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THE RED YEAR
A STORY OF
THE INDIAN MUTINY

THE RED YEAR

A STORY OF THE INDIAN MUTINY

BY

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"RAINBOW ISLAND," "THE PILLAR OF LIGHT," "HEART'S DELIGHT,"
"THE REVEILERS," "THE WINNING OF WINIFRED," "THE KING'S
MESSENGER," "THE FINAL WAR," ETC



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DELHI, 1857-1907

ONE night in red-hot May, from a corner of the Ridge,
I looked at Delhi's cannon-battered walls,
At its castellated fort on the river near the bridge,
At its temples, mosques, and creeper-clad mahals.
Each rock was like an oven, the air a furnace blast—
Though Persian singers oft called Delhi "Heaven"—
Yet soon I fell a-dreaming of the days that long have passed,
And the men who held the Ridge in '57.

Subsee Mundee's clay-built hovels fill a hollow on the right,
Hindu Rao's time-worn house stands on the hill—
You would never think, so peaceful is this blazing Indian night,
How many bones lie near you, white and still.
If ghosts could walk and talk, what a meeting there would be !
What rattling from the shingle and the tomb !
When officers and rank and file—horse, foot, artillery—
Met round the grey Memorial in the gloom !

They would gather from the valley—it is all one British grave—
From Cashmere Gate, and fort, and magazine,
From street and lane and bastion, where Nicholson the Brave
Laid down his life for country and for Queen.
From every nook and corner, with shako and Brown Bess,
In tattered uniforms of curious shape,
That gallant band would march, and the talk of every mess
Would be of reinforcements "round the Cape."

For they never heard of Suez nor its placid water-way,
They sailed o'er half the world to Hindustan.
They went there straight from Alma, from Balaclava's fray,
From the bullet-laden mists of Inkerman.
Lord rest their valiant souls !—they met the Briton's proudest fate,
Who loves that little island in the sea—
They found a hero's grave far beyond the Exile's Gate—
Let us honour their great deeds eternally.

They won us a wide Empire 'neath that sultry Eastern sky ;
They flaunted England's flag 'gainst heavy odds.
They writ in history's page that a race can never die
If it gives its best and bravest to the gods !
And that is why I dreamed a dream of fifty years ago,
And saw on Delhi's Ridge each silent ghost,
And prayed that we, if called upon, would face another foe
As steadfastly as that immortal host.

L. T.

THE RED YEAR

CHAPTER I

THE MESHES OF THE NET

ON a day in January, 1857, a sepoy was sitting by a well in the cantonment of Dum-Dum, near Calcutta. Though he wore the uniform of John Company, and his rank was the lowest in the native army, he carried on his forehead the caste-marks of the Brahmin. In a word, he was more than noble, being of sacred birth, and the Hindu officers of his regiment, if they were not heaven-born Brahmins, would grovel before him in secret, though he must obey their slightest order on parade or in the field.

To him approached a Lascar.

"Brother," said the new-comer, "lend me your brass pot, so that I may drink, for I have walked far in the sun."

The sepoy started as though a snake had stung him. Lascars, the sailor-men of India, were notoriously free-and-easy in their manners. Yet how came it that even a low-caste mongrel of a Lascar should offer such an overt insult to a Brahmin!

"Do you not know, swine-begotten, that your hog's

lips would contaminate my lotah?" asked he, putting the scorn of centuries into the words.

"Contaminate!" grinned the Lascar, neither frightened nor angered. "By holy Ganga, it is your lips that are contaminated, not mine. Are not the Government greasing your cartridges with cow's fat? And can you load your rifle without biting the forbidden thing? Learn more about your own caste, brother, before you talk so proudly to others."

Not a great matter, this squabble between a sepoy and a Lascar, yet it lit a flame in India that rivers of blood must be shed ere it was quenched. The Brahmin's mind reeled under the shock of the retort. It was true, then, what the agents of the dethroned King of Oudh were saying in the bazaar. The Government were bent on the destruction of Brahminical supremacy. He and his caste-fellows would lose all that made life worth living. But they would exact a bitter price for their fall from high estate.

"Kill!" he murmured in his frenzy, as he rushed away to tell his comrades the lie that made the Indian Mutiny possible. "Slay and spare not! Let us avenge our wrongs so fully that no accursed Feringhi shall dare again to come hither across the Black Water!"

The lie and the message flew through India with the inconceivable speed with which such ill tidings always travel in that country. Ever north went the news that the British Raj was doomed. Hindu fakirs, aglow with religious zeal, Musalman zealots, as eager for dominance in this world as for a houri-tenanted paradise in the next, carried the fiery torch of rebellion far and wide. And so the flame spread, and was fanned to red fury,

though the eyes of few Englishmen could see it, while native intelligence was aghast at the supineness of their over-lords.

One evening in the month of April, a slim, straight-backed girl stood in the verandah of a bungalow at Meerut. Her slender figure, garbed in white muslin, was framed in a creeper-covered arch. The fierce ardour of an Indian spring had already kissed into life a profusion of red flowers amid the mass of greenery, and if Winifred Mayne had sought an effective setting for her own fair picture, she could not have found one better fitted to its purpose.

But she was young enough and pretty enough to pay little heed to pose or background. In fact, so much of her smooth brow as could be seen under a broad-brimmed straw hat was wrinkled in a decided frown. Happily, her bright brown eyes had a glint of humour in them, for Winifred's wrath was an evanescent thing, a pallid sprite, rarely seen, and ever ready to be banished by a smile.

"There!" she said, tugging at a refractory glove. "Did you hear it? It actually shrieked as it split. And this is the second pair. I shall never again believe a word Behari Lal says. Wait till I see him. I'll give him such a talking-to."

"Then I have it in my heart to envy Behari Lal," said her companion, glancing up at her from the carriage-way that ran by the side of the few steps leading down from the verandah.

"Indeed! May I ask why?" she demanded.

"Because you yield him a privilege you deny to me."

"I was not aware you meant to call to-day. As it is, I am paying a strictly ceremonial visit. I wish I could speak Hindustani. Now, what would you say to Behari Lal in such a case?"

"I hardly know. When I buy gloves, I buy them of sufficient size. Of course, you have small hands—"

"Thank you. Please don't trouble to explain. And now, as you have been rude to me, I shall not take you to see Mrs Meredith."

"But that is a kindness."

"Then you shall come, and be miserable."

"For your sake, Miss Mayne, I would face Medusa, let alone the excellent wife of our Commissary-General, but fate, in the shape of an uncommonly headstrong arab, forbids. I have just secured a new charger, and he and I have to decide this evening whether I go where he wants to go, or he goes where I want to go. I wheedled him into your compound by sheer trickery. The really definite issue will be settled forthwith on the Grand Trunk Road."

"I hope you are not running any undue risk," said the girl, with a sudden note of anxiety in her voice that was sweetest music in Frank Malcolm's ears. For an instant he had a mad impulse to ask if she cared, but he crushed it ruthlessly, and his bantering reply gave no hint of the tumult in his breast. Yet he feared to meet her eyes, and was glad of a saluting sepoy who swaggered jauntily past the open gate.

"I don't expect to be deposited in the dust, if that is what you mean," he said. "But there is a fair chance that instead of carrying me back to Meerut, my friend Nejdi will take me to Aligarh. You see, he is an arab

of mettle. If I am too rough with him, it will break his spirit; if too gentle, he will break my neck. He needs the *main de fer sous le gant de velours*. Please forgive me! I really didn't intend to mention gloves again."

"Oh, go away, you and your arab. You are both horrid. You dine here to-morrow night, my uncle said?"

"Yes, if I don't send you a telegram from Aligarh. I may be brought there, you know, against my will."

Lifting his hat, he walked towards a huge pipal tree in the compound. Beneath its far-flung branches a syce was sitting in front of a finely-proportioned and unusually big arab horse. Both animal and man seemed to be dozing, but they woke into activity when the sahib approached. The arab pricked his ears, swished his long and arched tail viciously, and showed the whites of his eyes. A Bedouin of the desert, a true scion of the incomparable breed of Nejd, he was suspicious of civilisation, and his new owner was a stranger, as yet.

"Ready for the fray, I see," murmured Malcolm, with a smile. He wasted no time over preliminaries. Bidding the syce place his thumbs in the steel rings of the bridle, the young Englishman gathered the reins and a wisp of grey mane in his left hand. Seizing a favourable moment, when the struggling animal flinched from the touch of a low-lying branch on the off-side, he vaulted into the saddle. Chunga, the syce, held on until his master's feet had found the stirrups. Then he was told to let go, and Miss Winifred Mayne, niece of a Commissioner of Oudh, quite the most eligible young lady the Meerut district could produce that year, witnessed a display of cool, resourceful horsemanship as

the enraged arab plunged and curvetted through the main gate.

It left her rather flushed and breathless.

"I like Mr Malcolm," she confided to herself, with a little laugh, "but his manner with women is distinctly brusque! I wonder why!"

The Grand Trunk Road ran to left and right. To the left it led to the bazaar, the cantonment, and the civil lines; to the right, after passing a few houses tenanted by Europeans, it entered the open country on a long stretch of over a thousand miles to Calcutta and the south. In 1857 no thoroughfare in the world equalled the Grand Trunk Road. Beginning at Peshawur, in the extreme north of India, it traversed the Punjab for six hundred miles as far as Aligarh. Here it broke into the Calcutta and Bombay branches, each nearly a thousand miles in length. Wide and straight, well made and tree-lined throughout, it supplied the two great arteries of Indian life. Malcolm had selected it as a training-ground that evening because he meant to weary and subdue his too highly spirited charger. Whether the pace was fast or slow, Nejdi would be compelled to meet many varieties of traffic, from artillery elephants and snarling camels down to the humble bullock-cart of the ryot. Possibly, he would not shy at such monstrosities after twenty miles of a lathering ride.

The mad pace set by the arab when he heard the clatter of his feet on the hard road chimed in with the turbulent mood of his rider. Frank Malcolm was a soldier by choice and instinct. When he joined the Indian army, and became a subaltern in a native cavalry

regiment, he determined to devote himself to his profession. He gave his whole thought to it, and to nothing else. His interests lay in his work. He regarded every undertaking from the point of view of its influence on his military education, so it may be conceded instantly that the arrival in Meerut of an Oudh Commissioner's pretty niece should not have affected the peace of mind of this budding Napoleon.

• But a nice young woman can find joints in the armour of the sternest-souled young man. Her attack is all the more deadly if it be unpremeditated, and Frank Malcolm had already reached the self-depreciatory stage wherein a comparatively impecunious subaltern asks himself the sad question whether it be possible for such a one to woo and wed a maid of high degree, or her Anglo-Indian equivalent, an heiress of much prospective wealth and present social importance.

But money and rank are artificial, the mere varnish of life, and the hot breath of reality can soon scorch them out of existence.

Events were then shaping themselves in India that were destined to sweep aside convention for many a day. Had the young Englishman but known it, five miles from Meerut his arab's hoofs threw pebbles over a swarthy moullah, lank and travel-stained, who was hastening towards the Punjab on a dreadful errand. The man turned and cursed him as he passed, and vowed with bitter venom that when the time of reckoning came there would not be a Feringhi left in all the land. Malcolm, however, would have laughed had he heard. Affairs of state did not concern him. His only trouble was that Winifred Mayne stood on a pinnacle

far removed from the beaten path of a cavalry subaltern. So, being in a rare fret and fume, he let the grey arab gallop himself white, and when the high-mettled Nejdi thought of easing the pace somewhat, he was urged onward with the slight but utterly unprecedented prick of a spur.

That was a degradation not to be borne. The Calcutta Brahmin did not resent the Lascar's taunt more keenly. With a swerve that almost unscathed Malcolm, the arab dashed in front of a bullock-cart, swept between the trees on the west side of the road, leaped a broad ditch, and crashed into a field of millet. Another ditch, another field, breast-high with tall castor-oil plants, a frantic race through a grove of mangoes—when Malcolm had to lie flat on Nejdi's neck to avoid being swept off by the low branches—and horse and man dived headlong into deep water.

The splash, far more than the ducking, frightened the horse. Malcolm, in that instant of prior warning which the possessor of steady nerves learns to use so well, disengaged his feet from the stirrups. He was thrown clear, and, when he came to the surface, he saw that the arab and himself were floundering in a moat. Not the pleasantest of bathing-places anywhere, in India such a sheet of almost stagnant water has excessive peculiarities. Among other items, it breeds fever and harbours snakes, so Malcolm floundered rather than swam to the bank, where he had the negative satisfaction of catching Nejdi's bridle when that disconcerted steed scrambled out after him.

The two were coated with green slime. Being obviously unhurt, they probably had a forlornly comic

aspect. At any rate, a woman's musical laugh came from the lofty wall which bounded the moat on the further side, and a woman's clear voice said—

“A bold leap, sahib! Did you mean to scale the fort on horseback? And why not have chosen a spot where the water was cleaner?”

Before he could see the speaker, so smothered was he in dripping moss and weeds, Malcolm knew that some lady of rank had watched his adventure. She used the pure Persian of the Court, and her diction was refined. Luckily, he had studied Persian as well as its Indian offshoot, Hindustani, and he understood the words. He pressed back his dank hair, squeezed the water and slime off his face, and looked up.

To his exceeding wonder, his eyes met those of a young Mohammedan woman, a woman richly garbed, and of remarkable appearance. She was unveiled, an amazing fact in itself, and her creamy skin, arched eyebrows, regular features, and raven-black hair proclaimed her aristocratic lineage. She was leaning forward in an embrasure of the battlemented wall. Behind her, two attendants, oval-faced, brown-skinned women of the people, peered shyly at the Englishman. When he glanced their way, they hurriedly adjusted their silk saris, or shawls, so as to hide their faces. Their mistress used no such bashful subterfuge. She leaned somewhat further through the narrow embrasure, revealing by the action her bejewelled and exquisitely moulded arms.

“Perhaps you do not speak my language,” she said in Urdu, the tongue most frequently heard in upper India. “If you will go round to the gate—that way—” and she

waved a graceful hand to the left—"my servants will render you some assistance."

By that time Malcolm had regained his wits. A verse of a poem by Hafiz occurred to him.

"Princess," he said, "the radiance of your presence is as the full moon suddenly illumining the path of a weary traveller who finds himself on the edge of a morass."

A flash of surprise and pleasure lit the fine eyes of the haughty beauty perched up there on the palace wall.

"'Tis well said," she vowed, smiling with all the rare effect of full red lips and white even teeth. "Nevertheless, this is no time for compliments. You need our help, and it shall be given willingly. Make for the gate, I pray you."

She turned and gave an order to one of the attendants. With another encouraging smile to Malcolm she disappeared.

Leading the arab, who, with the fatalism of his race, was quiet as a sheep now that he had found a master, the young officer took the direction pointed out by the lady. Rounding an angle of the wall, he came to a causeway, spanned by a small bridge, which was guarded by the machicolated towers of a strong gate. A ponderous door, studded with great bosses of iron fashioned to represent elephants' heads, swung open—half reluctantly it seemed—and he was admitted to a spacious inner courtyard.

The number of armed retainers gathered there was unexpectedly large. He was well acquainted with the Meerut district, yet he had no notion that such a fortress existed within an hour's fast ride of the station

The king of Delhi had a hunting-lodge somewhere in the locality, but he had never seen the place. If this were it, why should it be crammed with soldiers? Above all, why should they eye him with such ill-concealed displeasure? Duty had brought him once to Delhi—it was barely forty miles from Meerut—and the relations between the feeble old king, Bahadur Shah, and the British authorities were then most friendly, while the hangers-on at the Court mixed freely with the Europeans. His quick intelligence caught at the belief that these men resented his presence because he was brought among them by the command of the lady. He knew now that he must have seen and spoken to one of the royal princesses. None other would dare to show herself unveiled to a stranger, and a white man at that. The manifest annoyance of her household was thus easily accounted for, but he marvelled at the strength of her bodyguard.

He was given little time for observation. A stout man, distinguished-looking, though disfigured by the marks of smallpox, a person evidently vested with authority, bustled forward and addressed him, civilly enough. Servants came with water and towels and cleaned his garments sufficiently to make him presentable, while other men groomed his horse. He was wet through, of course, but that was not a serious matter with the thermometer at 70° in the shade, and, despite the ordinance of the Prophet, a glass of excellent red wine was handed to him.

But he saw no more of the princess. He thought she would hardly dare to receive him openly, and her deputy gave no sign of admitting him to the interior of

the palace, which loomed around the square of the courtyard like some great prison.

A chaprassi recovered his hat, which he had left floating in the moat. Nejdi allowed him to mount quietly, and the stout door had closed on him, and he was picking his way across the fields towards the Meerut road, before he quite realised how curious were the circumstances which had befallen him since he parted from Winifred Mayne in the porch of her uncle's bungalow.

Then he bent forward in the saddle to stroke Nejdi's curved neck, and laughed cheerfully.

"You are wiser than I, good horse," said he. "When the game is up, you take things placidly. Here am I, your supposed superior in intellect, in danger of being bewitched by a woman's eyes. Whether brown or black, they play the deuce with a man if they shine in a woman's head. So ho, then, boy, let us home and eat, and forget these fairies in muslin and clinging silk."

Yet a month passed, and Frank Malcolm did not succeed in forgetting. Like any moth dancing round a lamp, the more he was singled the closer he fluttered, though the memory of the Indian princess's brilliant black eyes was soon lost in the sparkle of Winifred's brown ones.

As it happened, the young soldier was a prime favourite with the Commissioner, and it is possible that the course of true love might have run most smoothly if the red torch of war had not flashed over the land like the glare of some mighty volcano.

On Sunday evening, May 10th, Malcolm rode away from his own small bungalow and took the Aligarh

road. As in all up-country stations, the European residences in Meerut were scattered over an immense area. The cantonment was split into two sections by an irregular ravine, or nullah, running east and west. North of this ditch were many officers' bungalows, and the barracks of the European troops, tenanted by a regiment of dragoons, the 60th Rifles, and a strong force of artillery, both horse and foot. Between the infantry and cavalry barracks stood the soldiers' church. Fully two miles away, on the south side of the ravine, were the sepoy lines, and another group of isolated bungalows. The native town was in this quarter, while the space intervening between the British and Indian troops was partly covered with rambling bazaars.

Malcolm had been detained nearly half an hour by some difficulty which a subadar had experienced in arranging the details of the night's guard. Several men were absent without leave, and he attributed this unusual occurrence to the severe measures the colonel had taken when certain troopers refused to use the cartridges supplied for the new Enfield rifle. But, like every other officer in Meerut, he was confident that the nearness of the strongest European force in the North-West Provinces would certainly keep the malcontents quiet. Above all else, he was ready to stake his life on the loyalty of the great majority of the men of his own regiment, the 3rd Native Cavalry.

In pushing Nejdi along at a fast canter, therefore, he had no weightier matter on his mind than the fear that he might have kept Winifred waiting. When he dashed into the compound, and saw that there was no dogcart standing in the porch, he imagined that the girl had

gone without him, or horrible suspicion, with some other cavalier.

It was not so. Winifred herself appeared on the verandah as he dismounted.

"You are a laggard," she said severely.

"I could not help it. I was busy in the orderly-room. But why lose more time? If that fat pony of yours is rattled along we shall not be very much behind-hand."

"You must not speak disrespectfully of my pony. If he is fat, it is due to content, not laziness. And you are evidently not aware that Evensong is half an hour later to-day, owing to the heat. Of course, I expected you earlier, and, if necessary, I would have gone alone, but—"

She hesitated and looked over her shoulder into the immense drawing-room that occupied the centre of the bungalow from front to rear.

"I don't mind admitting," she went on, laughing nervously, "that I am a wee bit afraid these days—there is so much talk of a native rising. Uncle gets so cross with me when I say anything of the kind that I keep my opinions to myself."

"The country is unsettled," said Frank, "and it would be folly to deny the fact. But, at any rate, you are safe enough in Meerut."

"Are you sure? Only yesterday morning eighty-five men of your own regiment were sent to prison, were they not?"

"Yes, but they alone were disaffected. Every soldier knows he must obey, and these fellows refused point-blank to use their cartridges, though the Colonel said they might tear them instead of biting them. He could

go no further—I wonder he met their stupid whims even thus far.”

“Well, perhaps you are right. Come in for a minute or two. My uncle is in a rare temper. You must help to talk him out of it. By the way, where are all the servants? The dogcart ought to be here. *Koi hai!*”¹

No one came in response to her call. Thinking that a syce or chaprassi would appear in a moment, Frank hung Nejdi's bridle on a lamp-hook in the porch and entered the bungalow.

He soon discovered that Mr Mayne's wrath was due to a statement in a Calcutta newspaper that a certain Colonel Wheler had been preaching to his sepoy.

“What between a psalm-singing Viceroy and commanding officers who hold conventicles, we are in for a nice hot weather,” growled the Commissioner, shoving a box of cheroots towards Malcolm when the latter found him stretched in a long cane chair on the back verandah. “Here is Lady Canning trying to convert native women, and a number of missionaries publishing manifestoes about the influence of railways and steamships in bringing about the spiritual union of the world! I tell you, Malcolm, India won't stand it. We can do as we like with Hindu and Musalman so long as we leave their respective religions untouched. The moment those are threatened we enter the danger zone. Confound it, why can't we let the people worship God in their own way? If anything, they are far more religiously inclined than we ourselves. Where is the Englishman who will flop down in the middle of the road to say his prayers at

¹ The Anglo-Indian phrase for summoning a servant, meaning, “Is there anyone there?”

sunset, or measure his length along two thousand miles of a river-bank merely as a penance? Give me authority to pack a shipload of busybodies home to England, and I'll soon have the country quiet enough—"

An ominous sound interrupted the Commissioner's outburst. Both men heard the crackle of distant musketry. At first, neither was willing to admit its significance.

"Where is Winifred?" demanded Mr Mayne, suddenly.

"She is looking for a servant, I fancy. There was none in the front of the house, and I wanted a man to hold my horse."

A far-off volley rumbled over the plain, and a few birds stirred uneasily among the trees.

"No servants to be seen—at this hour!"

They looked at each other in silence.

"We must find Winifred," said the older man, rising from his chair.

"And I must hurry back to my regiment," said Frank.

"You think, then, that there is trouble with the native troops?"

"With the sepoys, yes. I have been told that the 11th and 20th are not wholly to be trusted. And those volleys were fired by infantry."

A rapid step and the rustle of a dress warned them that the girl was approaching. She came like a startled fawn.

"The servants' quarters are deserted!" she cried. "Great columns of smoke are rising over the trees, and you hear the shooting! Oh, what does it mean?"

"It means, my dear, that the dragoons and the 60th will have to teach these impudent rebels a much-needed lesson," said her uncle. "There is no cause for alarm. Must you really go, Malcolm?"

"Go!" broke in Winifred with the shrill accents of terror. "Where are you going?"

"To my regiment, of course," said Frank, smiling at her fears. "Probably we shall be able to put down this outbreak before the white troops arrive. Good-bye. I shall either return, or send a trustworthy messenger, within an hour."

And so, confident and eager, he was gone, and the first moments of the hour sped when, perhaps, a strong man in control at Meerut might have saved India

CHAPTER II

A NIGHT IN MAY

WINIFRED, quite unconsciously, had stated the actual incident that led to the outbreak of the Mutiny. The hot weather was so trying for the white troops in Meerut, many of whom, under ordinary conditions, would then have been in the hills, that the General had ordered a Church Parade in the evening, and at an unusual hour.

All day long the troopers of the 3rd Cavalry nursed their wrath at the fate of their comrades who had refused to handle the suspected cartridges. They had seen men whom they regarded as martyrs stripped of their uniforms and riveted in chains in front of the whole garrison on the morning of the 9th. Though fear of the British force in the cantonment kept them quiet, Hindu vied with Musalman in muttered execrations of the dominant race. The fact that the day following the punishment parade was a Sunday brought about a certain relaxation from discipline. The men loafed in the bazaars, were taunted by courtesans with lack of courage, and either drowned their troubles in strong drink or drew together in knots to talk treason.

Suddenly a sepoy raced up to the cavalry lines with thrilling news.

"The Rifles and Artillery are coming to disarm all the native regiments!" he shouted.

He had watched the 60th falling in for the Church Parade, and, in view of the action taken at Barrackpore and Lucknow—sepoy battalions having been disbanded in both stations for mutinous conduct—he instantly jumped to the conclusion that the military authorities at Meerut meant to steal a march on the disaffected troops. His warning cry was as a torch laid to a gun-powder train.

The 3rd Cavalry, Malcolm's own corps, swarmed out of bazaar and quarters like angry wasps. Nearly half the regiment ran to secure their picketed horses, armed themselves in hot haste, and galloped to the gaol. Smashing open the door, they freed the imprisoned troopers, struck off their fetters, and took no measures to prevent the escape of the general horde of convicts. Yet, even in that moment of frenzy, some of the men remained true to their colours. Captain Craigie and Lieutenant Melville Clarke, hearing the uproar, mounted their chargers, rode to the lines, and actually brought their troop to the parade-ground in perfect discipline. Meanwhile, the alarm had spread to the sepoys. No one knew exactly what caused all the commotion. Wild rumours spread, but no man could speak definitely. The British officers of the 11th and 20th regiments were getting their men into something like order when a sowar¹ clattered up, and yelled to the infantry that the European troops were marching to disarm them.

At once, the 20th broke in confusion, seized their muskets, and procured ammunition. The 11th wavered,

¹ It should be explained that a sepoy (properly "sipahi") is an infantry soldier, and a sowar a mounted one. The English equivalents are "private" and "trooper."

and were listening to the appeal of their beloved commanding officer, Colonel Finnis, when some of the 20th came back and fired at him. He fell, pierced with many bullets, the first victim of India's Red Year. His men hesitated no longer. Afire with religious fanaticism, they, too, armed themselves, and dispersed in search of loot and human prey. They acted on no preconceived plan. The trained troops simply formed the nucleus of an armed mob, its numbers ever swelling as the convicts from the gaol, the bad characters from the city, and even the native police, joined in the work of murder and destruction.

They had no leader. Each man emulated his neighbour in ferocity. Like wolves on the trail, they followed the scent of blood.

The rapid spread of the revolt was not a whit less marvellous than its lack of method or cohesion. Many writers have put forward the theory that, by accident, the mutiny broke out half an hour too soon, and that the rebels meant to surprise the unarmed white garrison while in church.

In reality, nothing was further from their thoughts. If, in a nebulous way, a date was fixed for a combined rising of the native army, it was Sunday, May 31st, three weeks later than the day of the outbreak. The soldiers, helped by the scum of the bazaar, after indulging in an orgy of bloodshed and plunder, dispersed and ran for their lives, fearing that the avenging British were hot on their heels. And that was all. There was no plan, no settled purpose. Hate and greed nerved men's hands, but head there was none.

Malcolm's ride towards the centre of the station gave

proof in plenty that the mutineers were a disorganised rabble, inspired only by unreasoning rancour against all Europeans, and, like every mob, eager for pillage. At first, he met but few native soldiers. The rioters were budmashes, the predatory class which any city in the world can produce in the twinkling of an eye when the strong arm of the law is paralysed. Armed with swords and clubs, gangs of men rushed from house to house, murdering the helpless inmates, mostly women and children, seizing such valuables as they could find, and setting the buildings on fire. These ghouls practised the most unheard-of atrocities. They spared no one. Finding a lady lying ill in bed, they poured oil over the bed-clothes, and thus started, with a human holocaust, the fire that destroyed the bungalow.

They were rank cowards too. Another Englishwoman, also an invalid, was fortunate in possessing a devoted ayah. This faithful creature saved her mistress by her quick-witted shriek that the mem-sahib must be avoided at all costs, as she was suffering from smallpox! The destroyers fled in terror, not waiting even to fire the house.

It was not until later days that Malcolm knew the real nature of the scene through which he rode. He saw the flames, he heard the Mohammedan yell of "Alī! Alī!" and the Hindu shriek of "Jai! Jai!" but the quick fall of night, its growing dusk deepened by the spreading clouds of smoke, and his own desperate haste to reach the cavalry lines, prevented him from appreciating the full extent of the horrors surrounding his path.

Arrived at the parade ground, he met Craigie and

Melville Clarke, with the one troop that remained of the regiment of which he was so proud. There were no other officers to be seen, so these three held a consultation. They were sure that the white troops would soon put an end to the prevalent disorder, and they decided to do what they could, within a limited area, to save life and property. Riding towards his own bungalow to obtain a sword and a couple of revolvers, Malcolm came upon a howling mob in the act of swarming into the compound of Craigie's house. Some score of troopers heard his fierce cry for help, and fell upon the would-be murderers, for Mrs Craigie and her children were alone in the bungalow. The ruffians were soon driven off, and Malcolm, not yet realising the gravity of the *émeute*, told the men to safeguard the mem-sahib until they received further orders, while he went to rejoin his senior officer.

Incredible as it may seem, the tiny detachment obeyed him to the letter. They held the compound against repeated assaults, and lost several men in hand-to-hand fighting.

The history of that terrible hour is brightened by many such instances of native fealty. The Treasury Guard, composed of men of the 8th Irregular Cavalry, not only refused to join the rebels, but defended their charge boldly. A week later, of their own free will, they escorted the treasure and records from Meerut to Agra, the transfer being made for greater safety, and beat off several attacks by insurgents on the way. They were well rewarded for their fidelity, yet, such was the power of fanaticism, within less than two months they deserted to a man.

The Acting Commissioner of Meerut, Mr Greathed,

whose residence was in the centre of the sacked area, took his wife to the flat roof of his house where he found that escape was impossible. A gang of ruffians ransacked every room, and, piling the furniture, set it alight, but a trustworthy servant, named Golab Khan, told them that he would reveal the hiding-place of the sahib and mem-sahib if they followed quickly. He thus decoyed them away, and the fortunate couple were enabled to reach the British lines under cover of the darkness.

And, while the sky flamed red over a thousand fires, and the blood of unhappy Europeans, either civilian families or the wives and children of military officers, was being spilt like water, where were the two regiments of white troops who, by prompt action, could have saved Meerut and prevented the siege of Delhi?

That obvious question must receive a strange answer, They were bivouacked on their parade-ground, doing nothing. The General in command of the station was a feeble old man suffering from senile decay. His brigadier, Archdale Wilson, issued orders that were foolish. He sent the dragoons to guard the empty gaol! After a long delay in issuing ammunition to the Rifles, he marched them and the gunners to the deserted parade-ground of the native infantry. They found a few belated sowars of the 3rd Cavalry, who took refuge in a wood, and the artillery opened fire at the trees! News came that the rebels were plundering the British quarters, and the infantry went there in hot haste. And then they halted, though the mulineers were crying, "Quick, brother, quick! The white men are coming!" and the scared suggestion went round; "To Delhi! That is our only chance!"

The moon rose on a terrified mob trudging or riding the forty miles of road between Meerut and the Mogul capital. All night long they expected to hear the roar of the pursuing guns, to find the sabres of the dragoons flashing over their heads. But they were quite safe. Archdale Wilson had ordered his men to bivouac, and they obeyed, though it is within the bounds of probability that had the rank and file known what the morrow's sun would reveal, there might have been another mutiny in Meerut that night, a mutiny of revenge and reprisal.

It was not that wise and courageous counsel was lacking. Captain Rosser offered to cut off the flight of the rebels to Delhi if one squadron of his dragoons and a few guns were given to him. Lieutenant Moller, of the 11th Native Infantry, appealed to General Hewitt for permission to ride alone to Delhi, and warn the authorities there of the outbreak. Sanction was refused in both cases. The bivouac was evidently deemed a masterpiece of strategy.

That Moller would have saved Delhi cannot be doubted. Next day, finding that the wife of a brother officer had been killed, he sought and obtained evidence of the identity of the poor lady's murderer, traced the man, followed him, arrested him single-handed, and brought him before a drum-head court-martial, by whose order he was hanged forthwith.

Craigie, Rosser, Moller, and a few other brave spirits showed what could have been done. But negligence and apathy were stronger that night than courage or self-reliance. For good or ill, the torrent of rebellion was suffered to break loose, and it soon engulfed a continent.

Malcolm failed to find Craigie, who had taken his troop in the direction of some heavy firing. Passing a bungalow that was blazing furiously, he saw in the compound the corpses of two women. A little further on he discovered the bodies of a man and four children in the centre of the road, and he recognised in the man a well-known Scotch trader whose shop was the largest and best in Meerut.

Then, for the first time, he understood what this appalling thing meant. He thought of Winifred, and his blood went cold. She and her uncle were alone in that remote house, far away on the Aligarh Road, and completely cut off from the comparatively safe northerly side of the station.

Giving heed to nought save this new horror of his imagination, he wheeled Nejdi, and rode at top speed towards Mr Mayne's bungalow. As he neared it, his worst fears were confirmed. One wing was on fire, but the flames had almost burnt themselves out. Charred beams and blackened walls showed stark and gaunt in the glow of a smouldering mass of wreckage. Twice he rode round the ruined house, calling he knew not what in his agony, and looking with the eyes of one on the verge of lunacy for some dread token of the fate that had overtaken the inmates.

He came across several bodies. They were all natives. One or two were servants, he fancied, but the rest were marauders from the city. Calming himself, with the coolness of utter despair, he dismounted, and examined the slain. Their injuries had been inflicted with some sharp, heavy instrument. None of them bore gunshot wounds. That was strange. If there was a

fight, and Mayne, perhaps even Winifred, had taken part in the defence, they must have used the sporting rifles in the house. And that suggested an examination of the dark interior. He dreaded the task, but it must not be shirked.

The porch was intact, and he hung Nejdî's bridle on the hook where he had placed it little more than an hour ago. The spacious drawing-room had been gutted. The doors (Indian bungalows have hardly any windows, each door being half glass) were open front and back. The room was empty, thank Heaven! He was about to enter and search the remaining apartments which had escaped the fire when a curiously cracked voice hailed him from the foot of the garden.

"Hallt! Who go dare?" it cried, in the queer jargon of the native regiments.

Malcolm saw a man hurrying towards him. He recognised him as a pensioner named Syed Mir Khan, an Afghan. The old man, a born fire-cater, insisted on speaking English to the *sahib-log*, unless, by rare chance, he encountered some person acquainted with Pushtu, his native language.

"I come quick, sahib," he shouted. "I know all things. I save sahib and miss-sahib. Yes, by dam, I slewed the cut-heads."

As he came nearer, he brandished a huge tulwar, and the split skulls and severed vertebræ of certain gentry lying in the garden became explicable. Delighted in having a sahib to listen, he went on—

"The mob appearing, I attacked them with great ferocity—yes, like terrible lion, by George! My fighting was immense. I had many actions with the pigs."

At last he quieted down sufficiently to tell Malcolm what had happened. He, with others, thinking the miss-sahib had gone to church, was smoking the hookah of gossip in a neighbouring compound. It was an instance of the amazing rapidity with which the rioters spread over the station that a number of them reached the Maynes' bungalow five minutes after the first alarm was given. It should be explained here that Mr Mayne, being a Commissioner of Oudh, was only visiting Meerut in order to learn the details of a system of revenue collection which it was proposed to adopt on the sequestered estates of the Oudh taluqdars. He had rented one of the best houses in the place, the owner being in Simla, and Syed Mir Khan held a position akin to that of caretaker in a British household. The looters knew how valuable were the contents of such an important residence, and the earliest contingent thought they would have matters entirely their own way.

As soon as Malcolm left, however, Mr Mayne loaded all his guns, while Winifred made more successful search for some of the servants. The Afghan was true to his salt, and their own retainers, who had come with them from Lucknow, remained steadfast at this crisis. Hence, the mob received a warm reception, but the fighting had taken place outside the bungalow, the defenders lining a wall at the edge of the compound. Indeed, a score of bodies lying there had not been seen by Malcolm during his first frenzied examination of the house.

Then an official of the Salt Department, driving past with his wife and child, shouted to Mr Mayne that he must not lose an instant if he would save his niece and himself.

"The sepoys have risen," was the horrifying message he brought. "They have surprised and killed all the white troops. They are sacking the whole station. You see the fires there? That is their work. This road is clear, but the Delhi Road is blocked."

Some distant yelling caused the man to flog his horse into a fast trot again; he and his weeping companions vanished into the gloom.

Mayne could not choose but believe. Indeed, several days elapsed before a large part of India would credit the fact that the British regiments in Meerut had not been massacred. A carriage and pair were harnessed. Several servants were mounted on all the available horses and ponies, and Mr Mayne and Winifred had gone down the Grand Trunk Road towards Bulandshahr and Aligarh.

"Going half an hour," said Syed Mir Khan, volubly. "I stand fast, slaying budmashes. They make rush in thousands, and I retreat with great glory. Then they put blazes in bungalow."

Now, Malcolm also might have accepted the sensational story of the Salt Department inspector, if, at that instant, the boom of a heavy gun had not come from the direction of the sepoy parade-ground. Another followed, and another, in the steady sequence of a trained battery. As he had just ridden from that very spot, which was then almost deserted, he was sure that the British troops had come from their cantonment. The discovery that Winifred was yet living, and in comparative safety, cleared his brain as though he had partaken of some magic elixir. He knew that Meerut itself was now the safest refuge within a hundred miles. Pro-

bably the bulk of the mutineers would strive to reach Delhi, and, of course, the dragoons and artillery would cut them off during the night. But he had seen many squads of rebels, mounted and on foot, hastening along the Grand Trunk Road, and it was no secret that detachments of the 9th Native Infantry at Bulandshahr and Aligarh were seething with Brahminical hatred of the abhorred cartridges.

Each second he became more convinced that Winifred and her uncle were being carried into a peril far greater than that which they had escaped. Decision and action were the same thing where he was concerned. Bidding the Afghan endeavour to find Captain Craigie, who might be trusted to send a portion of his troop to scour the road for some miles, and assuring the man of a big reward for his services, Frank mounted and galloped south. He counted on overtaking the fugitives in an hour, and persuading them to return with him. He rode with drawn sword, lest he might be attacked on the way, but it was a remarkable tribute to Möller's wisdom in offering to ride to Delhi that no man molested him, and such sepoys as he passed skulked off into the fields when they saw the glint of his sabre and recognised him as a British officer. They had no difficulty in that respect. A glorious full moon was flooding the peaceful plain with light. The trunks of the tall trees lining the road barred its white riband with black shadows, but Nejdi, good horse that he was, felt that this was no time for skittishness, and repressed the inclination to jump these impalpable obstacles.

And he made excellent progress. Eight miles from Meerut, in a tiny village of mud hovels which horse and

rider had every reason to remember, they suddenly dashed into a large company of mounted men and a motley collection of vehicles. There were voices raised in heated dispute, too, and a small crowd was gathered near a lumbering carriage, whose tawdry trappings and display of goldwork betokened the state equipage of some native dignitary.

Drawn up by its side was a European travelling barouche, empty, but Malcolm's keen eyes soon picked out the figures of Winifred and her uncle standing in the midst of an excited crowd of natives. So great was the hubbub that he was not noticed until he pulled up.

"I have come to bring you back to Meerut, Mr Mayne," he cried. "The mutiny has been quelled. Our troops are in command of the station and of all the main roads. You can return without the slightest risk, I assure you."

He spoke clearly and slowly, well knowing that some among the natives would understand him. His appearance, no less than his words, created a rare stir. The clamour of tongues was stilled. Men looked at him as though he had fallen from the sky. He could not be certain, but he guessed, that he had arrived at a critical moment. Indeed, the lives of his friends were actually in deadliest jeopardy, and there was no knowing what turn the events of the next minute might have taken. But a glance at Winifred's distraught face told him a good deal. He must be bold, with the careless boldness of the man who has the means of making his will respected.

"Stand aside, there !" he said in Hindustani. "And

you had better clear the roadway. A troop of cavalry is riding fast behind."

He dismounted, drew Nejdi's bridle over his left arm, and went towards Winifred. The girl looked at him with a wistfulness that was pitiful. Hope was struggling in her soul against the fear of grim death.

"Oh, Frank!" she sighed, holding out both her hands, "Oh, Frank, I am so frightened. We had a dreadful time at the bungalow, and these men look so fierce and cruel! Have you really brought help?"

"Yes," he said confidently. "You need have no further anxiety. Please get into your carriage."

Mr Mayne said something, but Malcolm never knew what it was, for Winifred fainted, and would have fallen had he not caught her.

"This Feringhi hath a loud voice," a man near him growled. "He talks of cavalry. Where are they?"

"The Meerut Road is empty," commented another.

"We have the Begum's order," said the first speaker, more loudly. "Let us obey, or it may be an evil thing for us."

"One of the daughters of Bahadur Shah is here," murmured Mayne, rapidly. "She says we are to be taken to Delhi, and slain if we resist. Where are your men? My poor niece! To think that I should have brought her from England for this!"

Malcolm, still holding Winifred's unconscious form clasped to his breast, laughed loudly.

"Mayne-sahib tells me that you have all gone mad," he shouted in the vernacular. "Have you no ears? Did you not hear the British artillery firing on the rebels a little time since? Ere day breaks, the road to Delhi

will be held by the white troops. What foolish talk is this of taking Mayne-sahib thither as a prisoner?"

The door of the bedizened travelling-coach was flung open, and the Mohammedan lady appeared who had befriended Frank when he fell into the moat. She alighted, and her aggressive servants drew awaysomewhat.

"It is my order," she said imperiously. "Who are you that you should dispute it?"

"I regret the heat of my words, Princess," he replied, grasping the frail chance that presented itself of wriggling out of a desperate situation. "Nevertheless, it is true that the native regiments at Meerut have been dispersed, and you yourself may have heard the guns as they advanced along the Delhi Road. Why should I be here otherwise? I came to escort my friends back to Meerut."

The princess drew nearer. In the brilliant moonlight she had an unearthly beauty—at once weird and Sibylline—but her animated features were chilled with disdain, and she pointed to the girl whose pallid face lay against Frank's shoulder.

"You are lying," she said. "You are not the first man who has lied for a woman's sake. That is why you are here."

"Princess, I have spoken nothing but the truth," he answered. "If you still doubt my word, let some of your men ride back with us. They will soon convince you. Perchance the information may not be without its value to you also."

The thrust was daring, but she parried it adroitly.

"No matter what has happened in Meerut, the destined end is the same," she retorted. Then she

fired into subdued passion. "The British Raj is doomed," she muttered, lowering her voice, and bringing her magnificent eyes close to his. "It is gone, like an evil dream. Listen, Malcolm-sahib. You are a young man, and ambitious. They say you are a good soldier. Come with me. I want someone I can trust. Though I am a king's daughter, there are difficulties in my path that call for a sword in the hands of a man not afraid to use it. Come! Let that weakling girl go where she lists—I care not. I offer you life, and wealth, and a career. She will lead you to death. What say you? Choose quickly. I am now going to Delhi, and to-morrow's sun shall see my father a king in reality as well as in name."

Malcolm's first impression was that the princess had lost her senses. He had yet to learn how completely the supporters of the Mogul dynasty were convinced of the approaching downfall of British supremacy in India. But his active brain fastened on to two considerations of exceeding importance. By temporising, by misleading this arrogant woman, if necessary, he might not only secure freedom for Winifred and Mayne, but gather most valuable information as to the immediate plans of the rebels.

"Your words are tempting to a soldier of fortune, princess," he said.

"Malcolm—" broke in Mayne, who, of course, understood all that passed.

"For Heaven's sake do not interfere," said Frank in English. "Suffer my friends to depart, princess," he went on in Persian. "It is better so. Then I shall await your instructions."

"Ah, you agree, then? That is good hearing. Yes, your white doll can go, and the grey-beard, too. Ere many days have passed, there will be no place for them in all India."

A commotion among the ring of soldiers and servants interrupted her. The tall, good-looking man whom Malcolm had seen in the hunting-lodge on the occasion of his ducking, came towards them with hurried strides. The princess seemed to be disconcerted by his arrival. Her expressive face betrayed her. Sullen anger, not unmingled with fear, robbed her of her good looks. Her whole aspect changed. She had the cowed appearance of one of her own serving-women.

"Remember!" she murmured. "You must obey me, none else. Come when I send for you!"

The man, who now carried on his forehead the insignia of a Brahmin, had no sooner reached the small space between the carriages than Mr Mayne cried delightedly to Malcolm :

"Why, if this is not Nana Sahib! Here is a piece of good luck! I know him well. If he has any control over this mob, we are perfectly safe."

Nana Sahib acknowledged the Commissioner's greeting with smiling politeness. But first he held a whispered colloquy with the princess, whom he entreated, or persuaded, to re-enter her gorgeous vehicle. She drove away without a look at Malcolm. Perhaps she did not dare to show her favour in the new-comer's presence.

Then Nana Sahib turned to the Europeans.

"Let the miss-sahib be placed in her carriage," he said, suavely. "She will soon revive in the air, and we march at once for Aligarh. Will you accept my escort

thus far, Mayne-sahib, or farther south, if you wish it? I think you will be safer with me than in taking the Meerut Road to-night."

Mayne agreed gladly. The commanding influence of this highly-placed native nobleman, who, despite an adverse decision of the Government, was regarded by every Mahratta as Peishwa, the ruler of a vast territory in Western India, seemed to offer more stable support that night than the broken reed of British authority in Meerut. Moreover, the Commissioner wished to reach Lucknow without delay. If the country were in for a period of disturbance his duty lay there, and he was planning already to send Winifred to Calcutta from Cawnpore, and thence to England, until the time of political trouble had passed.

"I am sure I am doing right," he said in answer to Frank's remonstrances. "Don't you understand, a native in Nana Sahib's position must be well informed as to the exact position of affairs. By helping me he is safeguarding himself. I am only too thankful he was able to subdue that fiery harpy, the Begum. She threatened me in the most outrageous manner before you came. Of course, Winifred and I will be everlastingly grateful to you for coming to our assistance. You are alone, I suppose?"

"Yes, though some of our troopers may turn up any minute."

"I fear not," said the older man, gravely. "This is a bad business, Malcolm. The Begum said too much. There are worse times in store for us. Do you really believe you can reach Meerut safely?"

"I rode here without hindrance."

"Let me advise you, then, to slip away before we start. That woman meant mischief, or she would never have dared to suggest that a British officer should throw in his lot with hers. Waste no time, and don't spare that good horse of yours. Be sure I shall tell Winifred all you have done for us. She is pulling round, I think, and it will be better that she should not see you again. Besides, the Nana's escort are preparing to march."

Frank's last memory of the girl he loved was a sad one. Her white face looked ethereal in the moonlight, and her bloodless lips were quivering with returning life. It was hard to leave her in such a plight, but it would only unnerve her again if he waited until she was conscious to bid her farewell.

So he rode back to Meerut, a solitary European on the eight miles of road, and no man challenged him till he reached the famous bivouac of the white garrison, the bivouac that made the Mutiny an accomplished fact.

CHAPTER III

HOW BAHADUR SHAH PROCLAIMED HIS EMPIRE

ON the morning of the 11th the sun that laid bare the horrors of Meerut shone brightly on the placid splendour of Delhi. This great city, the Rome of Asia, was also the Metz of Upper India, its old-fashioned though strong defences having been modernised by the genius of a Napier. Resting on the Jumna, it might best be described as of half-moon shape, with the straight edge running north and south along the right bank of the river.

In the centre of the line stood the imposing-looking red sandstone palace of Bahadur Shah, last of the Moguls. North of this citadel were the magazine, the church, some European houses, and the cutcherry, or group of minor law-courts, while the main thoroughfare leading in that direction passed through the Kashmir Gate. Southward from the fort stretched the European residential suburb known as Darya Gunj (or, as it would be called in England, the "Riverside District") out of which the Delhi Gate gave access to the open country and the road to Humayun's Tomb. Another gate, the Raj Ghat, opened directly on to the river between the palace and Darya Gunj. Thus, the walls of city and palace ran almost straight for two miles from the Kashmir Gate on the north to the Delhi Gate on the south, while the main road connecting the two passed the fort on the landward side.

The Lahore Gate of the palace, a magnificent structure, commanded the bazaar and its chief street, the superb Chandni Chowk, which extended due west for nearly two miles to the Lahore Gate of the city itself. Near the palace, in a very large garden, stood the spacious premises of the Delhi Bank. A little farther on, but on the opposite side of the Chowk was the Kotwallee, or police-station, and still farther, practically in the centre of the dense bazaar, two stone elephants marked the entrance to the beautiful park now known as the Queen's Gardens.

The remainder of the space within the walls was packed with the houses and shops of well-to-do traders, and the lofty tenements or mud hovels in which dwelt a population of artisans noted not only for their artistic skill, but for a spirit of lawlessness, a turbulent fanaticism, that had led to many scenes of violence in the city's earlier history.

The whole of Delhi, as well as the palace—which had its own separate fortifications—was surrounded by a wall seven miles long, twenty-four feet in height, well supplied with bastions, and containing ten huge gates, each a small fort in itself. The wall was protected by a dry fosse, or ditch, twenty-five feet wide and about twenty feet deep, and this, in turn, was guarded by a counterscarp and glacis.

On the north-west side of Delhi, and about a mile distant from the river, an irregular, rock-strewn spine of land, called the Ridge, rose above the general level of the plain, and afforded a panoramic view of the city and palace. The rising ground began half a mile from the Mori Gate—which was situated on that which may be

termed the landward side of the Kashmir Gate. It followed a course parallel with the river for two miles, and at its northerly extremity were situated the principal European bungalows and the military cantonment.

Delhi was the centre of Mohammedan hopes; its palace held the lineal descendant of Aurangzebe, with his children and grandchildren; it was stored to repletion with munitions of war; yet, such was the inconceivable folly of the rulers of India at that time, the nearest British regiments were stationed in Meerut, while the place swarmed with native troops, horse, foot and artillery!

A May morning in the Punjab must not be confused with its prototype in Britain. Undimmed by cloud, unchecked by cooling breeze, the sun scorches the earth from the moment his glowing rays first peep over the horizon. Thus, men who value their health and have work to be done, rise at an hour when London's streets are emptiest. Merchants were busy in the bazaar, soldiers were on parade, judges were sitting in the courts of the cutcherry, and the European housewives of the station were making their morning purchases of food for breakfast and dinner, when some of the loungers on the river-side wall saw groups of horsemen raising the dust on the Meerut Road beyond the bridge of boats which spanned the Jumna.

The word went round that something unusual had happened. Already the idlers had noted the arrival of a dust-laden royal carriage, which crossed the pontoons at break-neck speed and entered by the Calcutta Gate. That incident, trivial in itself, became important when those hard-riding horsemen came in sight. The political

air was charged with electricity. None knew whether it would end in summer lightning or in a tornado, so there was much running to and fro, and gesticulations, and excited whisperings among those watchers on the walls.

Vague murmurs of doubt and surprise reached the ears of two of the British magistrates, Mr Simon Fraser and Mr Hutchinson. They hurriedly adjourned the cases they were trying, and sent for their horses. One rode hard to the cantonment, and told Brigadier Graves what he had seen and heard; the other, knowing the immense importance of the chief magazine, went there to warn Lieutenant Willoughby, the officer in charge.

Here, then, in Delhi, were men of prompt decision, but the troops on whom they could have depended were forty miles away, in Meerut, in that never-to-be-forgotten bivouac. Meanwhile, the vanguard of the Meerut rebels had arrived. Mostly troopers of Malcolm's regiment, with some few sepoy who had stolen ponies on the way, they crossed the Jumna, some going straight to the palace by way of the bridge of boats, while others forded the river to the south, and made for the gaol, where, as usual, they released the prisoners. This trick of emptying the penitentiaries was more adroit than it seems at first sight. Not only were the mutineers sure of obtaining hearty assistance in their campaign of robbery and murder, but every gaol-bird headed direct for his native town as soon as he was gorged with plunder. There was no better means of disseminating the belief that the British power had crumbled to atoms. The convicts boasted that they had been set free by the rebels; they paraded their ill-gotten gains, and incited ignorant villagers to

emulate the example of the towns. Thus, a skilful and damaging blow was struck at British prestige. Neither Mohammedan moullah nor Hindu fakir carried such conviction to ill-informed minds as the appearance of some known malefactor decked out in the jewels and trinkets of murdered Englishwomen.

The foremost of the mutineers reined in their weary horses on the Zer Jharokha, a portion of the river-bed, beneath a balcony of the Baithak, or King's private sitting-room, on which Bahadur Shah, a decrepit old man of eighty, awaited them.

By his side stood his youngest daughter, the Roshinara Begum. Her eyes were blazing with triumph, yet her lips curved with contempt at the attitude of her trembling father.

"You see!" she cried. "Have I not spoken truly? These are the men who sacked Meerut. Scarce a Feringhi lives there save those whom I have saved to good purpose. Admit your troops! Proclaim yourself their ruler. A moment's firmness will win back your empire."

The aged monarch, now that the hour was at hand that astrologers had predicted and his courtiers had promised for many a year, faltered his dread lest they were not all committing a great mistake.

"This is no woman's work," he protested. "Where are my sons? Where is the Shahzada, Mirza Mogul?"

She knew. The heir-apparent and his brothers were cowering in fear, afraid to strike, yet hoping that others would strike for them. She almost dragged her father to the front of the balcony. The troopers recognized him with a fierce shout. A hundred sabres were waved frantically.

"Help us, O King!" they cried. "We pray your help in our fight for the faith!"

Captain Douglas, commandant of the palace guards, hearing the uproar, ran to the King. He did not notice the girl, Roshinara, who stood there like a caged tigress.

"How dare you intrude on the King's privacy?" he cried, striving to overawe the rebels by his cool demeanour. "You must lay down your arms if you wish His Majesty's clemency. He is here in person, and that is his command. Go to the Kotila of Firoz Shah, where your complaints will be heard."

A yell of defiance greeted his bold words. The Begum made a signal with her hand which was promptly understood. Away clattered the troopers towards the Raj Ghat Gate. There they were admitted without parley. The city hell-hounds sprang to meet them, and the slaughter of inoffensive Europeans began in Darya Gunj.

It was soon in full swing. The vile deeds of the night at Meerut were re-enacted in the vivid sunlight at Delhi. Leaving their willing allies to carry sword and torch through the small community in that quarter, the sowars rode to the Lahore Gate of the palace, which had been closed by Douglas and some other Englishmen. It was thrown open by the King's guards and dependants. Captain Douglas and the Commissioner, Mr Fraser, made vain appeals to men whose knees would have trembled at their frown a few minutes earlier, whereupon Fraser seized a musket and shot dead one of the mutineers. Thinking to escape and summon assistance from the cantonment, Douglas mounted the wall and leaped into the moat. He broke one, if not both, of his

legs. Some scared coolies lifted him and carried him back to the interior of the palace. Fraser tried to protect him while he was being taken to his apartments over the Lahore Gate, but an Abyssinian jeweller from the bazaar stabbed the Commissioner, and he was killed by the guards. Then the mob rushed upstairs and massacred the collector, Mr Hutchinson, the chaplain, Mr Jennings, his daughter, Miss Clifford, a lady who was their guest, and the injured Douglas.

Another dreadful scene was enacted in the Delhi Bank. Mr Beresford, the manager, and his brave wife, assisted by a few friends who happened to be in the building at the moment, made a stubborn resistance, but they were all cut down. The masters in the Government colleges were surprised and murdered in their class rooms. The missionaries, whether European or native, were slaughtered in their houses and schools. The editorial staff and compositors of the *Delhi Gazette*, having just produced a special edition of the paper announcing the crisis, were all stabbed or bludgeoned to death. In the telegraph office a young signaller was sending a thrilling message to Umballa, Lahore and the north.

"The sepoys have come in from Meerut," he announced with the slow tick of the earliest form of apparatus. "They are burning everything. Mr Todd is dead, and, we hear, several Europeans. We must shut up."

That was Delhi's requiem as a European station. The startled operators at Umballa could obtain no further intelligence, and, in the confusion of the days that followed, it was generally believed that the boy

was slain at his post.¹ Mr Todd, the telegraph master, was murdered on the Meerut Road, whither he had gone earlier to find out what was wrong with the telegraph wires.

The magistrate who galloped to the cantonment found no laggards there. Brigadier Graves sent Colonel Ripley with part of the 54th Native Infantry to occupy the Kashmir Gate. The remainder of the 54th escorted two guns under Captain de Teissier.

Ripley reached the main guard, just within the gate, when some troopers of the 3rd rode up. The colonel ordered his men to fire at them. The sepoy refused to obey, and the sowars, drawing their pistols, shot dead or severely wounded six British officers. Then the 54th bayoneted their colonel, but, hearing the rumble of de Teissier's guns, fled into the city. The guard of the gate, composed of men of the 38th, went with them, but their officer, Captain Wallace, had ridden, fortunately for himself, to hurry the guns. He was sent on to the cantonment to ask for reinforcements. Not a man of the 38th would follow him, but the 74th, commanded by Major Abbott, proclaimed their loyalty, and asked to be led against the mutineers.

Perforce, their commander trusted them. He brought them to the Kashmir Gate with two more guns, while the Brigadier and his staff, wondering why they heard nothing of the pursuing force from Meerut, thought it

¹ This statement is based on Holmes's *History of the Indian Mutiny*, Cave-Browne's *The Punjab and Delhi*, and *The Punjab Mutiny Report*. William Brendish, who is still living, was on duty at the Delhi telegraph office throughout the night of May 10th. Pilkington, who sent the actual message, died some years later.

advisable to gather the women and children and other helpless persons, both European and native, in the Flagstaff Tower, a small building situated on the northern extremity of the Ridge.

There, for some hours, a great company of frightened people endured all the discomforts of terrific heat, hunger, and thirst, while wives and mothers, striving to soothe their wailing little ones, were themselves consumed with anxiety as to the fate of husbands and sons.

At the main guard there was a deadlock. Major Abbott and his brother officers, trying to keep their men loyal, stood fast and listened to the distant turmoil in the city. Like the soldiers in Meerut, they never guessed a tithe of the horrors enacted there. They were sure that the white troops in Meerut would soon arrive and put an end to the prevalent anarchy. Yet the day sped, and help came not.

Suddenly the sound of a tremendous explosion rent the air, and a dense cloud of white smoke, succeeded by a pall of dust, rose between the gate and the palace. Willoughby had blown up the magazine! Why? Two artillery subalterns, who had fought their way through a mob stricken with panic for the moment, soon arrived. Their story fills one of the great pages of history.

Lieutenant Willoughby, a boyish-looking subaltern of artillery, whose shy, refined manners hid a heroic soul, lost no time in making his dispositions for the defence of the magazine when he knew that a mutiny was imminent. He had with him eight Englishmen, Lieutenants Forrest and Raynor, Conductors Buckley, Shaw, and Scully, Sub-Conductor Crow, and Sergeants Edwards and Stewart. The nine barricaded the outer

gates, and placed in the best positions guns loaded with grape. They laid a train from the powder store to a tree in the yard. Scully stood there. He promised to fire the powder when his young commander gave the signal.

Then they waited. A stormy episode was taking place inside the fort. Bahadur Shah held out against the vehement urging of his daughter, aided now by the counsel of her brothers. Ever and anon the King went to the river balcony which afforded a view of the Meerut Road. At last, he sent mounted men across the river. When these scouts returned, and he was quite certain that none but rebel sepoys were streaming towards Delhi from Meerut, he yielded.

The surrender of the magazine was demanded in his name. His adherents tried to rush the gates and walls, and were shot down in scores. The attack grew more furious and sustained. The white men served their smoking cannon with a wild energy that, for a time, made the gallant nine equal to a thousand. Of course, such a struggle could have only one end. Willoughby, in his turn, ran to the river bastion. Like the King, he looked towards Meerut. Like the King, he saw none but mutineers. Then, finding the enemy clambering over the walls and rushing into the little fort from all directions, he raised his sword and looked at Conductor Buckley. Buckley lifted his hat, the agreed signal, and Scully fired the train. Hundreds of rebels were blown to pieces, as they were already inside the magazine. Scully was killed where he stood. Willoughby leaped from the walls, crossed the river, and met his death while striving to reach Meerut. Lieutenants Forrest and Raynor, Conductors Buckley and Shaw, and

Sergeant Stewart escaped, and were given the Victoria Cross.

Yet, so curiously constituted is the native mind, the blowing-up of the magazine was the final tocsin of revolt. It seemed to place beyond doubt that which all men were saying. The King was fighting the English. Islam was in the field against the Nazarene. The Mogul Empire was born again, and the iron grip of British rule was relaxed. At once the sepoys at the Kashmir Gate fired a volley at the nearest officers, of whom three fell dead.

Two survivors rushed up the bastion and jumped into the ditch. Others, hearing the shrieks of some women in the guard-room, poor creatures who had escaped from the city, ran through a hail of bullets and got them out. Fastening belts and handkerchiefs together, the men lowered the women into the fosse, and, with extraordinary exertions, lifted them up the opposite side.

At the Flagstaff Tower, the 74th and the remainder of the 38th suddenly told their officers that they would obey them no longer. When this last shred of hope was gone, the Brigadier reluctantly gave the order to retreat. The women and children were placed in carriages, and a mournful procession began to straggle through the deserted cantonment along the Alipur Road.

Soon the fugitives saw their bungalows on fire. "Then," says that accurate and impartial historian of the mutiny, Mr T. R. E. Holmes, "began that piteous flight, the first of many such incidents which hardened the hearts of the British to inflict a terrible revenge. . . . Driven to hide in jungles or morasses from despicable vagrants—robbed, and scourged, and mocked by villagers, who had entrapped them with promises of

help—scorched by the blazing sun, blistered by burning winds, half-drowned in rivers which they had to ford or swim across, naked, weary and starving, they wandered on; while some fell dead by the wayside, and others, unable to move further, were abandoned by their sorrowing friends to die on the road.”

In such wise did the British leave Imperial Delhi. They came back later, but many things had to happen meanwhile.

The volcanic outburst in the Delhi district might have been paralleled further north were not the Punjab fortunate in its rulers. Sir John Lawrence was Chief Commissioner at Lahore. When that fateful telegram from Delhi was received in the capital of the Punjab, he was on his way to Murree, a charming and secluded hill station, for the benefit of his health. But, like most great men, Lawrence had the faculty of surrounding himself with able lieutenants.

His deputy, Robert Montgomery, whose singularly benevolent aspect concealed an iron will, saw at once that if the Punjab followed the lead of Meerut and Delhi, India would be lost. Lahore had a mixed population of a hundred thousand Sikhs and Mohammedans, born soldiers every man, and ready to take any side that promised to settle disputes by cold steel rather than legal codes. If these hot-heads, with their millions of co-religionists in the land of the Five Rivers, were allowed to gain the upper hand, they would sweep through the country from the mountains to the sea.

The troops, British and native, were stationed in the cantonment of Mian-mir, some five miles from Lahore. There were one native cavalry regiment and three native infantry battalions whose loyalty might be measured by

minutes as soon as they learnt that the standard of Bahadur Shah was floating over the palace at Delhi. To quell them, the authorities had the 81st Foot and two batteries of horse artillery, or, proportionately, far less a force than that at Meerut, the Britons being outnumbered eight times by the natives.

Montgomery coolly drove to Mian-mir on the morning of the 12th, took counsel with the brigadier, Stuart Corbett, and made his plans. A ball was fixed for that night. All society attended it, and men who knew that the morrow's sun might set on a scene of bloodshed and desolation, danced gaily with the ladies of Lahore. Surely those few who were in the secret of the scheme arranged by Montgomery and Corbett must have thought of a more famous ball at Brussels on a June night in 1815!

Next morning the garrison fell in for a general parade of all arms. The artillery and 81st were on the right of the line, the native infantry in the centre, and the sowars on the left. A proclamation by Government, announcing the disbandment of the 34th at Barrackpore was read, and may have given some inkling of coming events to the more thoughtful among the sepoys. But they had no time for secret murmurings. Manœuvres began instantly. In a few minutes the native troops found themselves confronted by the 81st and the two batteries of artillery.

Riding between the opposing lines, the brigadier told the would-be mutineers that he meant to save them from temptation by disarming them.

"Pile arms!" came the resolute command.

They hesitated. The intervening space was small. By sheer weight of numbers they could have borne down the British.

"81st—load!" rang out the ominous order.

As the ears of the startled men caught the ring of the ramrods in the Enfield rifles, their eyes saw the lighted portfires of the gunners. They were trapped, and they knew it. They threw down their weapons with sullen obedience, and the first great step towards the reconquest of India was taken.

Inspired by Montgomery, the district officers at Umritsar, Mooltan, Phillour, and many another European centre in the midst of warlike and impetuous races, followed his example and precept. Brigadier Innes, at Ferozpoore, hesitated. He tried half measures. He separated his two native regiments, and thought to disarm them on the morrow. That night one of them endeavoured to storm the magazine, burnt and plundered the station, and marched off towards Delhi. But Innes then made amends. He pursued and dispersed them. Only scattered remnants of the corps reached the Mogul capital.

Thus Robert Montgomery, the even-tempered, suave, smooth-spoken Deputy-Commissioner of Lahore! In the far north, at Peshawur, four other men of action gathered in conclave. The gay, imaginative, earnest-minded Herbert Edwardes; the hard-headed veteran, Sydney Cotton; the dashing soldier, Neville Chamberlain, and the lustrous-eyed, black-bearded, impetuous giant, John Nicholson—that genius, who, at thirty-five, had already been deified by a brotherhood of Indian fakirs, and placed by Mohammedans among the legendary heroes of their faith—these four sat in council and asked, "How best shall we serve England?"

They answered that question with their swords.

CHAPTER IV

ON THE WAY TO CAWNPORE

IN Meerut reigned that blessed thing, Pax Britannica otherwise known as the British bull-dog. But the bull-dog was kept on the chain, and peace obtained only within his kennel. Malcolm, deprived of his regiment, gathered under his command a few young civilians who were eager to act as volunteer cavalry, and was given a grudging permission to ride out to the isolated bungalows of some indigo-planters, on the chance that the occupants might have defended themselves successfully against the rioters.

In each case the tiny detachment discovered blackened walls and unburied corpses. The Meerut district abounded with Goojers, the hereditary thieves of India, and these untamed savages had lost none of their wild-beast ferocity under fifty years of British rule. They killed and robbed with an impartiality that was worthy of a better cause. When Europeans, native travellers and mails were swept out of existence, they fought each other. Village boundaries which had been determined under Wellesley's strong government at the beginning of the century were rearranged now with matchlock, spear and tulwar. Old feuds were settled in the old way, and six inches of steel were more potent than the longest Order in Council. Yet these ghouls fled at the sight of the smallest white force, and Malcolm and his irregulars

rode unopposed through a blood-stained and deserted land.

On the 21st of May, eleven days after the outbreak of the Mutiny, though never a dragoon or horse-gunner had left Meerut cantonment since they marched back to their quarters from the ever-memorable bivouac, Malcolm led his light horsemen north, along the Grand Trunk Road, in the direction of Mazuffernugger.

A native brought news that a collector and his wife were hiding in a swamp near the road. Happily, in this instance the two were rescued, more dead than alive. The man, ruler of a territory as big as the North Riding of Yorkshire, his wife, a young and well-born English-woman, were in the last stage of misery. The unhappy lady, half-demented, was nursing a dead baby. When the child was taken from her she fell unconscious, and had to be carried to Meerut on a rough litter.

The little cavalcade was returning slowly to the station¹ when one of the troopers caught the hoof-beats of a galloping horse behind them. Malcolm reined up, and soon a British officer appeared round a bend in the road. Mounted on a hardy country-bred, and wearing the semi-native uniform of the Company's regiments, the stranger was sufficiently remarkable-looking to attract attention apart from the fact that he came, absolutely alone, from a quarter where it was courting death to travel without an escort. He was tall and spare of build, with reddish-brown hair and beard, blue eyes that gleamed with the cold fire of steel, close-set lips, firm

¹ In India the word "station" denotes any European settlement outside the three Presidency towns. In 1857 there were few railways in the country.

chin, and the slightly-hooked nose with thin nostrils that seems to be one of Nature's tokens of the man born to command his fellows when the strong arm and clear brain are needed in the battlefield.

He rode easily, with a loose rein, and he waved his disengaged hand the instant he caught sight of the white faces.

"Are you from Meerut?" he asked, his voice and manner conveying a curious blend of brusqueness and gentility, as his tired horse willingly pulled up alongside Nejdi.

"Yes. And you?" said Malcolm, trying to conceal his amazement at this apparition.

"I am Lieutenant Hodson, of the 1st Bengal Fusiliers. I have ridden from Kurnaul, where the Commander-in-Chief is waiting until communication is opened with Meerut. Where is General Hewitt?"

"I will take you to him. From Kurnaul, did you say? When did you start?"

"About this hour yesterday."

Malcolm knew then that this curt-spoken cavalier had ridden nearly a hundred miles through an enemy's country in twenty-four hours.

"Is your horse equal to another hour's canter?" he inquired.

"He ought to be. I took him from a bunniah when my own fell dead in a village about ten miles in the rear."

Bidding a young bank manager take charge of the detachment, Frank led the new-comer rapidly to headquarters. Hodson asked a few questions, and made his companion's blood boil by the unveiled contempt he displayed on hearing of the inaction at Meerut.

"You want Nicholson here," said he, laughing with grim mirth. "By all the gods, he would horsewhip your general into the saddle."

"Hewitt is an old man, and cautious, therefore," explained Frank, in loyal defence of his chief. "Perhaps he deems it right to await the orders you are now bringing."

"An old man! You mean an old woman, perhaps? I come from one. I had to go on my knees almost before I could persuade Anson to let me start."

"Well, you must admit that you have made a daring and lucky ride."

"Nonsense! Why is one a soldier? I would cross the infernal regions if the need arose. If I had been in Meerut on that Sunday evening, no general that ever lived could have kept me out of Delhi before daybreak. The way to stop this mutiny was to capture that doddering old King, and hold him as a hostage, and twenty determined men could have done it easily in the confusion."

That was William Hodson's way. Men who met him began by disliking his hectoring, supercilious bearing. They soon learnt to forget his gruffness, and think only of his gallantry and good-comradeship.

At any rate, his stirring advice and the despatches he brought roused the military authorities at Meerut into activity. Carrying with him a letter to the Commander-in-Chief, he quitted Meerut again that night, and dismounted outside Anson's tent at Kurnaul at dawn on the second next day.

On the 27th, Archdale Wilson led out the garrison

towards the rendezvous fixed on by the force hurriedly collected in the Punjab for the relief of Delhi. On the afternoon of the 30th, cavalry vedettes reported the presence of a strong body of mutineers on the right bank of the river Hindun, near the village of Ghazi-uddin Nuggur, and at a place where a high ridge commanded an iron suspension bridge. It was found afterwards that the rebels meant to fight the two British forces in detail before they could effect a junction. The generalship of the idea was good, but the sepoy did not count on the pent-up wrath of the British soldiers, who were burning to avenge their murdered countrymen and dishonoured countrywomen, for it was now becoming known that many a fair English lady had met a fate worse than death ere sword or bullet stilled her anguish.

A company of the 60th Rifles dashed forward to seize the bridge, Lieutenant Light and his men took up the enemy's challenge with their heavy eighteen-pounders, and Colonel Mackenzie and Major Tombs, at the head of two batteries of horse artillery, crossed the river and turned the left flank of the sepoy force. Then the Rifles extended and charged, the mutineers yielded, and Colonel Custance with his dragoons sabred them mercilessly for some miles.

Next morning, Whitsunday, while the chaplains were conducting the burial-service over those who had fallen, the mutineers came out from Delhi again. A severe action began instantly. Tombs had two horses shot under him, and thirteen out of fifty men in his battery were killed or wounded. But the issue was never in doubt. After three hours' hard fighting the rebels broke and

fled. So those men in Meerut could give a good account of themselves when permitted. Actually, they won the two first battles of the campaign.

Exhausted by two days' strenuous warfare in the burning sun, they could not take up the pursuit. The men were resting on the field when a battalion of Ghoorkahs, the little fighting men of Nepaul, arrived under the command of Colonel Reid. They had marched by way of Bulandshahr, and Malcolm heard, to his dismay, that the native infantry detachment stationed there, aided by the whole population of the district, had committed the wildest excesses.

Yet Winifred and her uncle had passed through that town on the road to Cawnpore. Aligarh, too, was in flames, said Reid, and there was no communication open with Agra, the seat of government for the North-West Provinces. There was a bare possibility that the Maynes might have reached Agra, or that Nana Sahib had protected them for his own sake. Such slender hopes brought no comfort. Black despair sat in Malcolm's heart until the brigadier sent for him, and ordered him to take charge of the guard that would escort the records and treasure from Meerut to Agra. He hailed this dangerous mission with gloomy joy. Love had no place in a soldier's life he told himself. Henceforth he must remember Winifred only when his sword was at the throat of some wretched mutineer appealing for mercy.

He went to his tent to supervise the packing of his few belongings. His bearer,¹ a Punjabi Mohammedan, who cursed the sepoy fluently for disturbing the country

¹ A personal servant, often valet and waiter combined.

during the hot weather, handed him a note which had been brought by a camp-follower.

It was written in Persi-Arabic script, a sort of Arabic shorthand that demands the exercise of time and patience ere it can be deciphered by one not thoroughly acquainted with it. Thinking it was a request for employment which he could not offer, Malcolm stuffed it carelessly into a pocket. He rode to Meerut, placed himself at the head of the 8th Irregular Cavalry, a detachment whose extraordinary fidelity has already been narrated, and set forth next morning with his train of bullock-carts and their escort.

He called the first halt in the village where he had parted from Winifred. The headman professed himself unable to give any information, but the application of a stirrup-leather to his bare back while his wrists were tied to a cart-wheel soon loosened his tongue.

The King's hunting-lodge was empty, he whined, and the Roshinara Begum had gone to Delhi. Nana Sahib's cavalcade went south soon after the Begum's departure, and a moullah had told him, the headman, that the Nana had hastened through Aligarh on his way to Cawnpore, not turning aside to visit Agra, which was fifty miles down the Bombay branch of the Grand Trunk Road.

Malcolm drew a negative comfort from the moullah's tale. That night he encamped near a fair-sized village which was ominously denuded of men. Approaching a native hut to ask for a piece of charcoal, wherewith to light a cigar, he happened to look inside. To his very great surprise he saw, standing in a corner, a complete suit of European armour, made of tin, it is true,

but a sufficiently bewildering "find" in a Goojer hovel.

A woman came running from a neighbour's house. While giving him the charcoal she hastily closed the rude door. She pretended not to understand him when he sought an explanation of the armour, whereupon he seized her, and led her, shrieking, among his own men. The commotion brought other villagers on the scene, as he guessed it would. A few fierce threats, backed by a liberal display of naked steel, quickly evoked the curious fact that nearly all the able-bodied inhabitants "had gone to see the sahib-log¹ dance."

Even Malcolm's native troops were puzzled by this story, but a further string of terrifying words and more sabre-flourishing led to a direct statement that the white people who were to "dance" had been captured near the village quite a week earlier and imprisoned in a ruined tomb about a mile from the road. It was risky work to leave the valuable convoy for an instant, but Malcolm felt that he must probe this mystery. Taking half a dozen men with him, and compelling the woman to act as guide, he went to the tomb in the dark.

The building, a mosque-like structure of considerable size, was situated in the midst of a grove of mango trees. A clear space in front of the tomb was lighted with oil lamps and bonfires. It was packed with uproarious natives, and Malcolm's astonished gaze rested on three European acrobats doing some feat of balancing. A clown was cracking jokes in French, some nuns were singing dolefully, and a trio of girls, wearing the con-

¹ A generic term for Europeans.

ventional gauze and spangles of circus-riders, were standing near a couple of piebald ponies.

He and his men dashed in among the audience, and the Goojers ran for dear life when they caught sight of a sahib at the head of an armed party. The performers and the nuns nearly died of fright, believing that their last hour had surely come. But they soon recovered from their fear, only to collapse more completely from joy. A French circus, it appeared, had camped near a party of nuns in the village on the main road, and were captured there when the news came that the English were swept out of existence. Most fortunately for themselves, the nuns were regarded as part of the show, and the villagers, after robbing all of them, penned them in the mosque and made them give a nightly performance. There were five men and three women in the circus troupe, and among the four nuns was the grave reverend mother of a convent.

Malcolm brought them to the village and caused it to be made known that unless every article of value and every rupee in money stolen from these unfortunate people, together with a heavy fine, were brought to him by daybreak, he would not only fire each hut and destroy the standing crops, but he would also hang every adult male belonging to the place he could lay hands on.

These hereditary thieves could appreciate a man who spoke like that. They met him fairly, and paid in full. When the convoy moved off, even that amazing suit of armour, which was used for the state entry of the circus into a town, was strapped on to the back of a trick pony.

The nuns, he ascertained, were coming from Fategarh to Umballa, and they had met the great retinue of Nana

Sahib below Aligarh. With him were two Europeans, a young lady and an elderly gentleman, but they were travelling so rapidly that it was impossible to learn who they were or whither they were going.

Here, then, was really good news. Like every other Englishman in India, Malcolm believed that the mutiny was confined to a very small area, of which his own station was the centre. He thought that if Winifred and her uncle reached Cawnpore they would be quite safe.

He brightened up so thoroughly that he quite enjoyed a sharp fight next day when the budmashes of Bulandshahr regarded the straggling convoy as an easy prey.

There were three or four such affairs ere they reached Agra, and his Frenchmen proved themselves to be soldiers as well as acrobats. On the evening of the 2nd of June, he marched his cavalcade into the splendid fortress immortalised by its marble memorials of the great days of the Mogul Empire.

The fact that a young subaltern had brought a convoy from Meerut was seized on by the weak and amiable John Colvin, Lieutenant-Governor of the North-West Provinces, as a convincing proof of his theory that the bulk of the native army might be trusted, and that order would soon be restored. Each day he was sending serenely confident telegrams to Calcutta, and receiving equally reassuring ones from a fatuous Viceroy. It was with the utmost difficulty that his wiser subordinates got him to disarm the sepoy regiments in Agra itself. He vehemently assured the Viceroy that the worst days of the outbreak were over, and issued a proclamation offering forgiveness to all mutineers who gave up their arms,

"except those who had instigated others to revolt, or taken part in the murder of Europeans."

Such a man was sure to regard Malcolm's bold journey from the wrong point of view. So delighted was he that he gave the sowars two months' pay, lauded Malcolm in the *Gazette*, and forthwith despatched him on a special mission to General Sir Hugh Wheeler at Cawnpore, to whom he recommended Frank for promotion and appointment as aide-de-camp.

This curious sequence of events led to Malcolm's following Winifred Mayne along the road she had taken exactly three weeks earlier. The route to Cawnpore lay through Etawah, a place where revolt had already broken out, but which had been evacuated by the mutineers, who, like those at Aligarh, Bulandshahr, Mainpuri, Meerut, and a score of other towns, ran off to Delhi after butchering all the Europeans within range.

With a small escort of six troopers, his servant, and two pack-horses, he travelled fast. As night was falling on 4th June, he re-entered the Grand Trunk Road some three miles north of Bithoor, where, all unknown to him, Nana Sahib's splendid palace stood on the banks of the Ganges.

It was his prudent habit to halt in small villages only. Towns might be traversed quickly without much risk, as even the tiniest display of force insured safety, but it was wise not to permit the size of his escort to be noted at leisure, when a surprise attack might be made in the darkness.

Therefore, expecting to arrive at Cawnpore early next day, he elected not to push on to Bithoor, and proposed to pass the night under the branches of a great pipal

tree. Chumru, his Mohammedan bearer, was a good cook in addition to his many other acquirements. Having purchased, or made his master pay for, which is not always the same thing in India, a small kid (by which please understand a young goat) in the village, he lit a fire, slew the kid, to the accompaniment of an appropriate verse from the Koran, and compounded an excellent stew.

A native woman brought some chupatties and milk, and Malcolm, being sharp-set with hunger, ate as a man can only eat when he is young and in splendid health, and has ridden hard all day.

He had a cigar left, too, and he was searching his pockets for a piece of paper to light it when he brought forth that Persi-Arabic letter which reached him at the close of the second battle of Ghazi-ud-din Nuggur.

He was on the point of rolling it into a spill, but some subtle influence stopped him. He rose, walked to Chumru's fire, and lit the cigar with a burning stick. Then, summoning a smart younger jemadar with whom he had talked a good deal during the journey, he asked him to read the chit. The woman who supplied the chupatties fetched a tiny lamp. She held it while the trooper bent over the strange scrawl, and ran his eyes along it to learn the context.

And this is what he read—

“To all whom it may concern. Be it known that Malcolm-sahib, late of the Company's 3rd Regiment of Horse, is a friend of the heaven-born princess Roshinara Begum, and, provided he comes to the palace at Delhi within three days from the date hereof, he is to be given safe-conduct by all who owe allegiance to the Light of the World, the renowned King of Kings and lord of all India, Bahadur Shah, Fuzl-Ilahi, Panah-i-din.’

The trooper scowled. Those concluding words—"By the grace of God, Defender of the Faith"—perhaps touched a sore place, for he, too, was a true believer.

"You are a long way from Delhi, sahib, and the chit is a week old. I suppose you did not pay the expected visit to her Highness the Begum?" he said.

"If you are talking of the Begum Roshinara, daughter of the King of Delhi," put in the woman, who was ready enough to indulge in a gossip with these good-looking soldiers, "she passed through this place to-day."

"Surely you are telling some idle tale of the bazaar," said Malcolm.

"No, sahib. My brother is a grass-cutter in the Nana's stables. While I was at the well this morning a carriage came down the road. It was a rajah's carriage, and there were men riding before and behind. I asked my brother if he had seen it, and he said that it brought the Begum to Bithoor, where she is to wed the Nana."

"What! A Mohammedan princess marry a Brahmin!"

"It may be so, sahib. They say these great people do not consider such things when there is aught to be gained."

"But what good purpose can this marriage serve?"

The woman looked up at Malcolm under her long eye-lashes.

"Where have you been, sahib, that you have not heard that the sepoy has proclaimed the Nana as King?" she asked timidly.

"King! Is he going to fight the Begum's father?"

"I know not, sahib, but Delhi is far off, and Cawnpore is near. Perchance they may both be kings."

A man's voice called from the darkness, and the

woman hurried away. Malcolm, of course, was in a position to appraise the accuracy of her story. He knew that the Nana, a native dignitary with a grievance against the Government, was a guest of Bahadur Shah a month before the mutiny broke out, and was at the Meerut hunting-lodge on the very night of its inception. Judging by Princess Roshinara's words, her relations with the Brahmin leader were far from lover-like. What then, did this sudden journey to Cawnpore portend? Was Sir Hugh Wheeler aware of the proposed marriage, with all the terrible consequences that it heralded? At any rate, his line of action was clear.

"Get the men together, Akhab Khan," he said to the jemadar. "We march at once."

Within five minutes they were on the road. There was no moon, and the trees bordering both sides of the way made the darkness intense. The still atmosphere, too, was almost overpowering. The dry earth, sun-baked to a depth of many feet, was giving off its store of heat accumulated during the day. The air seemed to be quivering as though it were laden with the fumes of a furnace. It was a night when men might die or go mad under the mere strain of existence. Its very languor was intoxicating. Nature seemed to brood over some wild revel. A fearsome thunderstorm or howling tornado of dust might reveal her fickleness of mood at any moment.

It was Man, not the elements, that was destined to war that night. The small party of horsemen were riding through the scattered houses of Bithoor, and had passed a brilliantly-lighted palace which Malcolm took to be the residence of Nana Sahib, when they were

suddenly ordered to halt. Some native soldiers, not wearing the Company's uniform, formed a line across the road. Malcolm, drawing his sword, advanced towards them.

"Whose troops are you?" he shouted.

There was no direct answer, but a score of men, armed with muskets and bayonets, and carrying a number of lanterns, came nearer. It must be remembered that Malcolm, a subaltern of the 3rd Cavalry, wore a turban and sash. He spoke Urdu exceedingly well, and it was difficult in the gloom to recognise him as a European.

"We have orders to stop and examine all wayfarers—" began some man in authority; but a lifted lantern revealed Frank's white face; instantly, several guns were pointed at him.

"Follow me!" he cried to his escort.

A touch of the spurs sent Nejdi with a mighty bound into the midst of the rabble who held the road. Malcolm bent low in the saddle, and a scattered volley revealed the tree-shrouded houses in a series of bright flashes. Fortunately, under such conditions, there is more room to miss than to hit. None of the bullets harmed horse or man, and the sowars were not quite near enough to be in the line of fire. After a quick sweep or two with his sword, Malcolm saw that his men were laying about them heartily. A pack-horse, however, had stumbled, bringing down the animal ridden by Chumru, the bearer. To save his faithful servant, Frank wheeled Nejdi, and cut down a native who was lunging at Chumru with a bayonet.

More shots were fired, and a sowar was wounded.

He fell, shouting to his comrades for help. A general mêlée ensued. The troopers slashed at the men on foot, and the sepoy's fired indiscriminately at anyone on horseback. The uproar was so great, and the fighting so strenuous, that Malcolm did not hear the approach of a body of cavalry until a loud voice bawled :

"Why should brothers slay brothers? Cease your quarrelling, in the name of the faith! Are there not plenty of accursed Feringhis on whom to try your blades?"

Then the young officer saw, too late, that he was surrounded by a ring of steel. Yet he strove to rally his escort, got four of the men to obey his command, and, placing himself in front, led them at the vague forms that blocked the road to Cawnpore. In the confusion he might have cut his way through had not Nejdi unfortunately jumped over a wounded man at the instant Frank was aiming a blow at a sowar. His sword swished harmlessly in the air, and his adversary, hitting out wildly, struck the Englishman's head with the forte of his sabre. The violent shock dazed Malcolm for a second, but all might yet have been well were it not for an unavoidable accident. A sepoy's bayonet became entangled in the reins. In the effort to free his weapon the man gave such a tug to the bit on the near side that the arab crossed his forelegs and fell, throwing his rider violently. Frank landed fairly on his head. His turban saved his neck, but could not prevent a momentary concussion. For a while he lay as one dead.

When he came to his senses he found that his arms were tied behind his back, that he had been carried

under a big tree, and that a tall native, in the uniform of a subadar of the 2nd Bengal Cavalry, was holding a lantern close to his face.

"I am an officer of the 3rd Cavalry," he said, trying to rise. "Why do you, a man in my own service, suffer me to be bound?"

"You are no officer of mine, Feringhi," was the scornful reply. "You are safely trussed because we thought it better sport to dangle you from a bough than to stab you where you dropped. Quick, there, with that heel-rope, Abdul Huq. We have occupation. Let us hang this crow here to show other Nazarenes what they may expect. And we have no time to lose. The Nana may appear at any moment."



CHAPTER V

A WOMAN INTERVENES

THAT ominous order filled Malcolm's soul with a fierce rage. He was not afraid of death. The wine of life ran too strongly in his veins that craven fear should so suddenly quell the excitement of the combat that had ended thus disastrously. But his complete helplessness—the fact that he was to be hanged like some wretched felon by men wearing the uniform of which he had been so proud—these things stirred him to the verge of frenzy.

Oddly enough, in that moment of anguish he thought of Hodson, the man who rode alone from Kurnaul to Meerut. Why had Hodson succeeded? Would Hodson, knowing the exceeding importance of his mission, have turned to rescue a servant or raise a fallen horse? Would he not rather have dashed on like a thunderbolt, trusting to the superior speed of his charger to carry him clear of his assailants? And Nejdi! What had become of that trusted friend? Never before, arab though he was, had he been guilty of a stumble. Perhaps he was shot, and sobbing out his gallant life on the road, almost at the foot of the tree which would be his master's gallows.

A doomed man indulges in strange reveries. Malcolm was almost as greatly concerned with Nejdi's imagined fate as with his own desperate plight when the trooper

who answered to the name of Abdul Huq brought the heel-rope that was to serve as a halter.

The man was a Pathan, swarthy, lean, and sinewy, with the nose and eyes of a bird of prey. Though a hawk would show mercy to a fledgeling sparrow sooner than this cut-throat to a captive, the robber instinct in him made him pause before he tied the fatal noose.

"Have you gone through the Nazarene's pockets, sirdar?" he asked.

"No," was the impatient answer. "Of what avail is it? These chota-sahibs¹ have no money. And Cawnpore awaits us."

"Nevertheless, every rupee counts. And he may be carrying letters of value to the Maharajah. Once he is swinging up there he will be out of reach, and our caste does not permit us to defile our hands by touching a dead body."

While the callous ruffian was delivering himself of this curious blend of cynicism and dogma, his skilled fingers were rifling Malcolm's pockets. First he drew forth a sealed packet addressed to Sir Hugh Wheeler. He recognised the Government envelope, and, though neither of the pair could read English, Abdul Huq handed it to his leader with an "I-told-you-so" air.

It was in Frank's mind to revile the men, but, most happily, he composed himself sufficiently to resolve that he would die like an officer and a gentleman, while the last words on his lips would be a prayer.

The next document produced was the Persi-Arabic scrawl which purported to be a "safe-conduct" issued by Bahadur Shah, whom the rebels acclaimed as their

¹ Junior officers.

ruler. Until that instant, the Englishman had given no thought to it. But when he saw the look of consternation that flitted across the face of the subadar when his eyes took in the meaning of the writing, despair yielded to hope, and he managed to say thickly—

“Perhaps you will understand now that you ought to have asked my business ere you proposed to hang me off-hand.”

His active brain devised a dozen expedients to account for his presence in Bithoor, but the native officer was far too shrewd to be beguiled into setting his prisoner at liberty. After re-reading the pass, to make sure of its significance, the rebel curtly told Abdul Huq and another sowar to bring the Feringhi into the presence of the Maharajah, by which title he evidently indicated Nana Sahib.

The order was, at least, a reprieve, and Malcolm breathed more easily. He even asked confidently about his horse and the members of his escort. He was given no reply save a muttered curse, a command to hold his tongue, and an angry tug at his tied arms.

It is hard to picture the degradation of such treatment of a British officer by a native trooper. The Calcutta Brahmin who was taunted by a Lascar—a warrior-priest insulted by a social leper—scarce flinched more keenly under the jibe than did Malcolm when he heard the tone of his captors. Truly the flag of Britain was trailing in the mire, or these men would not have dared to address him in that fashion. In that bitter moment he felt for the first time that the Mutiny was a real thing. Hitherto, in spite of the murders and incendiarism of Meerut, the risings in other stations, the

proclamation of Bahadur Shah as Emperor, and the actual conflicts with the Mogul's armed retainers on the battle-field of Ghazi-ud-din Nuggur, Malcolm was inclined to treat the outburst as a mere blaze of local fanaticism, a blaze that would soon be stamped under heel by the combined efforts of the East India Company's troops and the Queen's forces. Now, at last, he saw the depth of hate with which British dominion was regarded in India. He heard Mohammedans alluding to a Brahmin as a leader—so might a wolf and a snake make common alliance against a watch-dog. From that hour dated a new and sterner conception of the task that lay before him and every other Briton in the country. The Mutiny was no longer a welcome variant to the tedium of the hot weather. It was a life-and-death struggle between West and East, between civilization and barbarism, between the laws of Christianity and the lawlessness of Mohammed, supported by the cruel, inhuman, and nebulous doctrines of Hinduism.

Not that these thoughts took shape and coherence in Malcolm's brain as he was being hurried to the house of Nana Sahib. A man may note the deadly malice of a cobra's eye, but it is not when the poison fangs are ready to strike that he stops to consider the philosophy underlying the creature's malign hatred of mankind.

Events were in a rare fret and fume in the neighbourhood of Cawnpore that night. As a matter of historical fact, while Malcolm was hearing from the villager that Roshinara Begum had come to Bithoor, the 1st Native Infantry and 2nd Cavalry had risen at Cawnpore.

Nana Sahib was deep in intrigue with all the sepoy regiments stationed there, and his adherents ultimately

managed to persuade these two corps to throw off their allegiance to the British Raj. Following the recognised routine, they burst open the gaol, burnt the public offices, robbed the Treasury, and secured possession of the magazine. Then, while the ever-swelling mob of criminals and loafers made pandemonium in the bazaar, the saner spirits among the mutineers hurried to Bithoor to ascertain the will of the man who, by common consent, was regarded as their leader.

He was expecting them, eagerly perhaps, but with a certain quaking that demanded the assistance of the "Raja's peg," a blend of champagne and brandy that is calculated to fire heart and brain to madness more speedily than any other intoxicant. He was conversing with his nephew, Rao-sahib, and his chief lieutenants, Tantia Topi and a Mohammedan named Azim-Ullah, when the native officers of the rebel regiments clattered into his presence.

"Maharajah," said their chief, "a kingdom is yours if you join us, but it is death if you side with the Nazarenes."

The Nana laughed, with the fine air of one who sees approaching the fruition of long-cherished plans. He advanced a pace, confidently.

"What have I to do with the British?" he asked. "Are they not my enemies, too? I am altogether with you."

"Will you lead us to Delhi, Maharajah?"

"Why not? That is the natural rallying-ground of all who wish the downfall of the present Government."

"Then behold, O honoured one, we offer you our fealty."

They pressed near him, tendering the hilts of their swords. He touched each weapon, and placed his hands on the head of its owner, vowing that he would keep his word, and be faithful to the trust they reposed in him.

"Our brothers of the 53rd and 56th have not joined us yet," said one.

"Then let us ride forth and win them to our sides," said the Nana, grandiloquently. He went into the courtyard, mounted a gaily-caparisoned horse, and, surrounded by the rebel cohort, cantered off towards Cawnpore.

Thus it befell that the mob of horsemen pressed past Malcolm and his guards as they entered the palace. The subadar tried in vain to attract the Nana's attention. Fearing lest he might be forgotten if he were not in the forefront of the conspiracy, this man bade his subordinates take their prisoner before the Begum, and ran off to secure his horse and race after the others. He counted on the despatches gaining him a hearing.

Abdul Huq, more crafty than his chief, smiled.

"Better serve a king's daughter than these Shia dogs who are so ready to fawn on a Brahmin," said he to his comrade, another Pathan, and a Sunni like himself, for Islam, united against Christendom, is divided into seventy-two warring sects. Hence, the wavering loyalty of two sepoy battalions in Cawnpore carried Malcolm out of the Nana's path, and led him straight to the presence of Princess Roshinara.

The lapse of three weeks had paled that lady's glowing cheeks and deepened the lustre of her eyes. Not only was she worn by anxiety, in addition to the physical

fatigue of the long journey from Delhi, but the day's happenings had not helped to lighten her cares. Yet she was genuinely amazed at seeing Malcolm.

"How come you to be here?" she cried instantly, addressing him before Abdul Huq could open his mouth in explanation.

"As your highness can see for yourself, I am brought hither forcibly by these slaves," said Frank, thinking that now or never must he display a bold front.

"How did you learn that I had left Delhi?"

"The journeyings of the Princess Roshinara are known to many."

"But you came not when I summoned you."

"Your highness's letter did not reach me until after the affair on the Hindun River."

"What is all this idle talk?" broke in Abdul Huq roughly. "This Feringhi was carrying despatches—"

"Peace, dog!" cried the Begum. "Unfasten the sahib's arms, and begone. What! Dost thou hesitate!"

She clapped her hands, and some members of her bodyguard ran forward.

"Throw these troopers into the courtyard," she commanded. "If they resist—"

But the Pathans were too wise to refuse obedience. Not yet had the rebels felt their true power. They sullenly untied Malcolm's bonds, and disappeared. Using eyes and ears each moment to better advantage, Frank was alive to the confusion that reigned in Nana Sahib's abode. Men ran hither and thither in aimless disorder. The Brahmin's retainers were like jackals who knew that the lion had killed and the feast was

spread. The only servants who preserved the least semblance of discipline were those of the Princess Roshinara. It was an hour when the cool brain might contrive its own ends.

"I am, indeed, much beholden to you, Princess," said Frank. "I pray you extend your clemency to my men. I have an escort of six sowars and a servant. Some of them are wounded. My horse, too, which I value highly—"

He paused. He saw quite clearly that she paid no heed to a word that he was saying. Her black eyes were fixed intently on his face, but she was thinking, weighing in her mind, some suddenly-formed project. He was a pawn in the game on the political chess-board, and some drastic move was imminent.

Some part of his speech had reached her intelligence. She caught him by the wrist, and hurried him along a corridor into a garden, muttering as she went—

"Allah hath sent thee, Malcolm-sahib. What matters thy men and a horse? Yet will I see to their safety, if that be possible. Yes, yes, I must do that. You will need them. And remember, I am trusting thee. Wilt thou obey my behests?"

"I would be capable of little gratitude if I refused, Princess," said he, wondering what new outlet the whirligig of events would provide.

Leading him past an astonished guardian of the zenana, who dared not protest when this imperial lady thought fit to profane the sacred portal by admitting an infidel, she brought Malcolm through a door into a larger garden surrounded by a high wall. She pointed to a pavilion at its farthest extremity.

"Wait there," she said. "When those come to you whom you will have faith in, do that which he who brings them shall tell you. Fail not. Your own life and the lives of your friends will hang on a thread, yet trust me that it shall not be severed while you obey my commands."

With that cryptic message, she walked back to the door, which was immediately slammed behind her. Having just been snatched from the very gate of eternity by the Begum's good offices, Malcolm determined to fall in with her whims so long as they did not interfere with his duty. Although Cawnpore was in the hands of the mutineers, and he had lost his despatches, he determined, at all costs, to reach Sir Hugh Wheeler if that fine old commander were still living. Meanwhile, he hastened to the baradari, an elegant structure which was approached by a flight of steps, and stood in the angle of two high and battlemented walls.

The place was empty, and singularly peaceful after the uproar of the village and of that portion of the palace which faced the Grand Trunk Road.

Overhead the sky was clear and starlit, but beyond the walls stretched a low, half luminous bank of mist, and he was peering that way fully a minute before he ascertained that the garden stood on the right bank of the Ganges. Almost at his feet the great river was murmuring on its quiet course to the sea, and the mist was due to the evaporation of its waters, which were mainly composed of melted snow from the ice-capped Himalayas.

When his eyes grew accustomed to his surroundings he made out the shape of a native boat moored beneath the wall. It had evidently brought a cargo of forage to

Bithoor. So still was the air that the scent of the hay lingered yet in the locality.

Between Bithoor and Cawnpore the Ganges takes a wide bend. At first, Malcolm scarce knew in which quarter to look for the city, but distant reports and the glare of burning dwellings soon told him more than its mere direction. So Cawnpore, in its turn, had yielded to the canker that was gnawing the vitals of India! He wondered if Allahabad had fallen. And Benares! And the populous towns of Bengal—perhaps even the capital city itself? The Punjab was safe. Hodson told him that. But would it remain safe? He had heard queer tales of the men who dwelt in the bazaars of Lahore, Umritsar, Rawalpindi, and the rest. Nicholson and John Lawrence were there; could they hold those warrior-tribes in subjection, or, better still, in leash? He might not hazard an opinion. His sky had fallen. This land of his adoption was his no longer. He was an outlaw, hunted and despised, depending for his life on the caprice of a fickle-minded woman. Then he thought of the way his comrades of the 60th, of the dragoons and the artillery, had chased the sepoys from the Hindun, and his soul grew strong again. Led by British officers, the native troops were excellent, but, deprived of the only leaders they really respected, they became an armed mob, terrible to women and children, but of slight account against British-born men.

His musings were disturbed by the sound of horses advancing quietly across a paddy field which skirted that side of the wall running at a right angle with the river. It was impossible to see far, owing to the mist that clung close to the ground, but he could not be

mistaken as to the presence of a small body of mounted men within a few yards. They had halted too, but his alert ears caught the occasional clink of accoutrements, and the pawing of a horse in the soft earth. He racked his brain to try and discover some connection between this cavalry post and the parting admonition given by Begum Roshinara, and he might have guessed the riddle in part had he not heard hurried footsteps in the garden.

They came, not from the door by which he was admitted, but from the palace itself. Whoever the new-comers were, they made straight for the pavilion, and, as he was unarmed, he did not hesitate to show himself against the sky-line. For ill or well, he wanted to know his fate, and he determined to spring over the battlements in the hope of reaching the river if he received the slightest warning of hostile intent by those who sought him.

"Is that you, Malcolm?" said a low voice, and his heart leaped when he recognised Mr Mayne's accents.

"Yes. Can it be possible that you are here?"

He ran down the stone steps. On the level of the garden he could see three figures, one a white-robed native, one a man in European garments, and the third a woman wrapped in a dark cloak. A suppressed sob uttered by the woman sent a gush of hot blood to his face. He sprang forward. In another instant Winifred was in his arms. And that was their unspoken declaration of love—in the garden of Nana Sahib's house at Bithoor—while within hail were thousands who would gladly have torn them limb from limb, and the southern horizon was aflame with the light of their brethren's dwelling-places.

"Oh, Frank, dear," whispered the girl, brokenly, "what evil fortune has led you within these walls? Yet, I thank God for it. Promise you will kill me ere they drag me from your side again."

"Hush, Winifred. For the sake of all of us calm yourself," said her uncle. "This man says he has brought us here to help us to escape. Surely you can find in Malcolm's presence some earnest of his good faith."

The native now intervened. Speaking with a certain dignity, and using the language of the court, he said that they had not a moment to lose. They must descend the wall by means of a rope, and in the field beyond they would find three of the officer-sahib's men, with his horse and a couple of spare animals. Keeping close to the river until they came to a tree-lined nullah—a small ravine cut by a minor tributary of the Ganges—they should follow this latter till they approached the Grand Trunk Road, taking care not to be seen as they crossed that thoroughfare. Then, making a *détour*, they must avoid the village, and endeavour to strike the road again about two miles to the north of Bithoor, thereafter travelling at top speed towards Meerut, but letting it be known in the hamlets on the way that they came from Cawnpore.

This unlooked-for ally impressed the concluding stipulation strongly on Malcolm, but, when asked for a reason, he said simply:

"It is the Princess's order. Come! There is no time for further speech. Here is the rope."

He uncoiled a long cord from beneath his cummerbund, and, running up the steps, adjusted it to a pillar

of the baraduri with an ease and quickness that showed familiarity with such means of exit from a closely-guarded residence.

"Now, you first, sahib," said he to Malcolm. "Then we will lower the miss-sahib, and the burra-sahib can follow."

There was nothing to be gained by questioning him, especially as Mayne murmured that he could explain a good deal of the mystery underlying the Begum's wish that they should go north. The exterior field was reached without any difficulty. Within twenty yards they encountered a little group of mounted men, and Malcolm found, to his great delight, that Chumru, his bearer, was holding Nejdi's bridle, while his companions were Akhab Khan and two other troopers who had ridden from Agra. To make the miracle more complete, Malcolm's sword was tied to the arab's saddle, and his revolvers were still in the holsters.

Winifred, making the best of a man's saddle until they could improvise a crutch at their first halt, would admit of no difficulty in that respect. The fact that her lover was present had lightened her heart of the terror which had possessed her during many days.

They were on the move, with the three sharp-eyed sowars leading, when the noise made by a number of horsemen coming towards them on the landward side and in front, brought them to an abrupt halt.

"Spread out to the right until you reach the river," cried a rough voice, which Malcolm was sure he identified as belonging to Abdul Huq. "Then we cannot miss them. And remember, brothers, if we secure the girl unharmed, we shall earn a rich reward from the Maharajah."

Winifred, shivering with fear again, knew not what the man said, but she drew near to Malcolm and whispered—

“Not into their hands, Frank, for God’s sake!”

The movement of her horse’s feet had not passed unnoticed.

“Be sharp, there!” snarled the Pathan again. “They are not far off, and only six of them. Shout, you on the right when you are on the bank.”

“None can pass between me and the stream,” replied a more distant voice.

“Forward, then! Keep line! Not too fast, you near the wall.”

Frank loosened his sword from its fastenings and took a revolver in his left hand, in which he also held the reins. He judged Abdul Huq to be some fifty yards distant, and he was well aware that the fog became thinner with each yard as he turned his back on the river.

“Take Winifred back to the angle of the wall,” he whispered to Mayne. “You will find a budgerow¹ there. Get your horses on board, if possible, and I shall join you in a minute or less. If I manage to scatter these devils, we shall outwit them yet.”

It was hopeless, he knew, to attempt to ride through the enemy’s cordon. There would be a running fight against superior numbers, and Winifred’s presence made that a last resource. The most fortunate accident of the deserted craft being moored beneath the palace wall offered a far more probable means of escape. What blunder or treachery had led to this attack he

¹ A large native boat.

could not imagine. Nor was he greatly troubled with speculation on that point. Winifred must be saved, he had a sword in his hand, and he was mounted on the best horse in India. What better hap could a cavalry subaltern desire than such a fight under such conditions?

In order not only to drown the girl's protest when her uncle turned her horse's head, but also to deceive his opponents, Frank thundered forth an order that was familiar to their ears.

"The troop will advance! Draw swords! Walk—trot—charge!"

Chumru, though no fighting man, realised that he was expected to make a row, and uttered a blood-curdling yell. Inspired by their officer's example, the sowars dashed after him with splendid courage. They were on their startled pursuers so soon, the line having narrowed more quickly than they expected, that they hurtled right through the opposing force without a blow being struck or a shot fired. As it chanced, no better manœuvre could have been effected. When they wheeled, and Frank managed to shoot two men at close range, it seemed to the amazed rebels that they were being attacked from the very quarter from which they had advanced.

Under such conditions even the steadiest of troops will break, and at least endeavour to reach a place where their adversaries are not shrouded in a dense mist. And that was exactly what occurred in this instance. Nearly all the mutineers swung round, and galloped headlong for the landward boundary of the paddy field. Shouting to his plucky assistants to come back, Frank called

out to Chumru, and bade him join them. He was hurrying towards the corner of the palace grounds, when a shriek from Winifred set his teeth on edge.

"I am coming," he cried. "What has happened? Where are you, Mayne?"

"Here, close to the boat. Look out there! Two sowars are carrying off my niece. For Heaven's sake, save her! I am wounded, but never mind me."

Malcolm had the hunter's lore, a species of Red Indian cunning in the stalker's art. Instead of rushing blindly forward, he halted his men promptly and listened. Sure enough, he heard stumbling footsteps by the water's edge. Leaping from Nejdi's back, he sprang down the crumbling bank and came almost on top of Abdul Huq and his brother Pathan. Their progress was hindered by Winifred's frantic struggles and their own brutal efforts to stop her from screaming, and they were taken unaware by Frank's unexpected leap.

A thrust that went home caused a vacancy in a border clan, but before the avenger could withdraw his weapon, Abdul Huq was swinging his tulwar. He was no novice in the art, and Malcolm must have gone down under the blow had not Winifred seen its murderous purpose and seized the man's arm. That gave her lover the second he needed. He recovered his sword, but was too near to stab or cut, so he met the case by dealing the swarthy one a blow with the hilt between the eyes that would have felled an ox. Never before had the Englishman hit any man with such vigorous good-will. This rascal was owed a debt for the indignity he had offered the sahib in the village, and now he was paid in full.

He fell insensible, with part of his body resting in the water. It was a queer moment for noting a trivial thing, yet Frank saw that the man's turban did not fall off. He had lost his own turban during the mêlée on the Grand Trunk Road, and, as it would soon be daylight, he stooped to secure Abdul Huq's headgear. Oddly enough, it was fastened by a piece of cord under the Pathan's chin—an almost unheard-of device this, to be adopted by a native. With a sharp pull, Frank broke the cord, and jammed the turban on his head. He was determined to have it, if only because no greater insult can be inflicted on a Mohammedan than to bare his head.

The incident did not demand more than a few seconds for its transaction, and Winifred hardly noticed it, so unstrung was she. Without more ado, Malcolm took her in his arms and carried her up the bank. He told the troopers and his servant to follow with the horses as quietly as possible, and led the way towards the budgerow.

Arrived at the boat, they found Mayne standing in the water and leaning helplessly against the side of the craft. He had been struck down by one of the precious pair who thought to carry off Winifred, but, luckily, it was a glancing blow, and not serious in its after-effects.

With a rapidity that was almost magical, the horses were put on board, the boat shoved off, and the huge mat sail hoisted to get the benefit of any breeze that might be found in mid-stream. The current carried them away at a fair rate, and, as they passed the place where Abdul Huq had fallen in the river, Malcolm fancied he heard a splash and a gurgle, as though a crocodile had found something of interest.

CHAPTER VI

THE WELL

NOT until many months later did Malcolm learn the true cause of Roshinara Begum's anxiety that he and his friends should hasten to Meerut, and let it be known on the way that they came from Cawnpore. Yet there were those in Bithoor that night who fully appreciated the tremendous influence on the course of political events of Winifred's flight northwards.

The girl herself little dreamed she was such an important personage. But that is often the case with those who are destined to make history. In this instance, the baulking of a Brahmin prince's passions was destined to change the whole trend of affairs in Northern India.

Nana Sahib escorted Mayne from Meerut to Cawnpore because the safeguarding of the Judicial Commissioner of Oudh was a safe card to play in that troubled period. As he travelled south, reports reached him on every hand that nothing could now stop the spread of the Mutiny, and, with greater certainty in his plans, came a project that he would not have dared to harbour even a week earlier.

Winifred, naturally a high-spirited and lively girl, soon recovered from the fright of that fateful Sunday evening. She had seen little of the tragedy enacted in Meerut; she knew less of its real horrors. Notwithstanding the

intense heat, the open-air life of the march was healthy, and, in many respects, agreeable.

The Nana was a courteous and considerate host. He took good care that his secret intelligence of occurrences at Delhi and other stations should remain hidden from Mayne, and, while his ambitions mounted each hour, he cast many a veiled glance at the graceful beauty of the fair English girl who moved like a sylph among the brown-skinned satyrs surrounding her.

Once the party had reached Bithoor, the Nana's tone changed. Instead of sending his European guests into Cawnpore, whence safe transit to Calcutta was still practicable, he kept them in his palace, on the pretext that the roads were disturbed.

He contrived at first to hoodwink Mr Mayne by giving him genuine news of the wholesale outbreak in the North-West, and by adding wholly false tidings of massacres at Allahabad, Benares, and towns in Lower Bengal. At last, when Mayne insisted on going into Cawnpore, the native threw aside pretence, said he could not "allow" him to depart, and virtually made uncle and niece prisoners.

But he treated them well. A clear-headed Brahmin, to whom intrigue was the breath of life, was not likely to make the mistake of being too precipitate in his actions. The wave of religious fanaticism sweeping over the land might recede as rapidly as it had risen. Muslim and Hindu, Pathan and Brahmin, who fraternised to-day, might be at each other's throats to-morrow. So the Nana was a courteous jailer. Beyond the loss of their liberty the captives had nothing to complain of, and he met Mayne's vehement reproaches with unmoved

good-humour, protesting all the while that he was acting for the best.

Winifred took fright, however. Her woman's intuition looked beneath the mask. For her uncle's sake she kept her suspicions to herself, but she suffered much in secret, and her distress might well have moved a man of high character to sympathy. Each time she met the Nana he treated her with more apparent friendliness. She recoiled from his advances as she might shrink from a venomous snake.

Fortunately there were others in Bithoor who understood the Brahmin's motives, and saw within them the germ of failure for their own plans. Nana Sahib was an exceedingly important factor in the success of the scheme that meditated the re-establishment of the Mogul dynasty. Recognised by the Mahrattas, the great warlike race of Western India, as their leader, looked on as the pivot of Hindu support to the Mohammedan monarchy, it was absolutely essential that he should captain the rebel garrison of Cawnpore in a triumphant march to Delhi.

For that reason a marriage, distasteful to both, had already been arranged between him and the Roshinara Begum. For that reason he had travelled to many centres of disaffection during the months of March and April, winning doubtful Hindu princes to the side of Bahadur Shah by his tact and ready diplomacy. For that reason, too, the native officers of the first regiments in revolt at Cawnpore made him swear, even at the twelfth hour, that he would lead them to Delhi.

His unforeseen infatuation for an Englishwoman might upset the carefully-laid plot. Under other con-

ditions, a dose of poison would have removed poor Winifred from the scene, but that simple expedient was not to be thought of, as the Nana's vengeful disposition was sufficiently well known to his associates to make them fear the outcome.

Therefore they left nothing to chance, and actually brought the Princess Roshinara post-haste from Delhi, believing that her presence would insure the inconstant wooer's return with her at the right moment.

While the majority pulled in one way, there was an active minority that wished the Nana to set up an independent kingdom. His nephew, and his Mohammedan friend, Azim-Ullah, were convinced that their faction would lose all influence as soon as their chief was swallowed up in the maelstrom of the imperial court. If Winifred supplied the spell that kept the Nana at Bithoor, they were quite content that it should be allowed to exercise its power.

Hence, Malcolm's arrival gave the Begum a chance that her quick wit seized upon. Why not, she argued, connive at the Englishwoman's escape, and let it become known that she has fled back to Meerut? When the Nana returned from Cawnpore, flushed with wine and conquest, this should be the first news that greeted him, and his amorous rage would go hand in hand with the other considerations that urged his immediate departure for the North. That was not the device of a woman who loved; it savoured of the cool statecraft of a Lucrezia Borgia.

No more curious mixture of plot and counter-plot came to light during that disastrous upheaval in India.

Never did events of the utmost magnitude to the community at large hinge on incidents so trivial.

A truculent thief like Abdul Huq was able to defeat the intent of a king's daughter, and a couple of sharp-eyed troopers, riding to a bluff overlooking the river, could report that they saw the budgerow on which the sahib-log escaped, drifting down-stream towards Cawnpore!

Thus the intrigue miscarried twice. Winifred was free; the clear inference was that her uncle and Malcolm would go straight to their friends in the cantonment.

There was a scene of violence, nearly culminating in murder, when Nana Sahib came to Bithoor at dawn. He met the scorn of Roshinara with a furious insolence that stopped short of bloodshed only on account of the prudence still governing most of his actions. Not yet was he drunk with power. That madness was soon to obsess him. But he lent a willing ear to the counsels of Rao-sahib and Azim-Ullah.

Soon after daybreak he galloped to Kulianpur, on the road to Delhi, whither some thousands of sepoy had already gone, and harangued them eloquently on the glory, not to speak of the loot, they would acquire by attacking the accursed English at Cawnpore.

They were easily swayed. Acclaiming the Nana as a prince worthy of obedience, they marched after him, and thus sealed the doom of many hundreds of unhappy beings who thought, at that moment, they would be spared the dreadful fate that had befallen other stations.

Oddly enough, a Brahmin who now saw his hopes of regaining a fair way towards realisation, placed one act of courtesy to his credit before

he made his name the synonym for all that is base and despicable in the history of warfare. He wrote a letter to Sir Hugh Wheeler, warning the gallant old general that he might expect to be attacked forthwith.

Perhaps it is straining a point to credit him with any sense of fair play. The letter may have been a last flicker of respect for the power of Britain, a haunting fear of the consequences if the mutiny failed. It is probable he wished to provide written proof of a plea that he was an unwilling agent in the clutch of a mutinous army. However that may be, he wrote, and never did letter carry more bitter disappointment to a Christian community.

Sir Hugh Wheeler, having decided, most unfortunately as it happened, against occupying the strongly-built magazine on the river bank as a refuge, had constructed a flimsy entrenchment on a level plain close to the native lines. He was sure the sepoys would revolt, but he believed they would hurry off to Delhi, and he refused to give them an excuse for rebellion by seizing the magazine.

Towards the end of May he wrote to Henry Lawrence at Lucknow for help, and Lawrence generously sent him fifty men of the 32nd, and half a battery of guns, though even this small force could ill be spared from the capital of Oudh.

Sir Hugh made the further mistake of trusting Nana Sahib's professions of loyalty. He actually entrusted the Treasury to the protection of Nana's retainers, in spite of Lawrence's plain warning that the Brahmin's recent movements put him under grave suspicion.

Nevertheless, Wheeler acted with method. His judgment was clear, if occasionally mistaken, and he had every reason to believe that the only attacks he would be called on to repel would be made by the bazaar mob.

On the night of June 4th, the thousand men, women, and children who had gathered behind the four-foot mud wall that formed the entrenchment were left unmolested by the mutineers. During the 5th they watched the destruction of their bungalows, and knew that the rebels were plundering the city, robbing rich native merchants quite as readily as they killed any Europeans who were not under Wheeler's charge. Late that day came Nana Sahib's letter. It was a bitter disappointment, but "the valiant never taste death but once," and the Britons in Cawnpore resolved to teach the mutineers that the men who had conquered them many times in the field could repeat the lesson again and again.

About ten o'clock on the morning of the 6th, flames rising from houses near at hand gave evidence of the approach of the rebels. Irregular spurts of musketry heralded the appearance of confused masses of armed men. A cannon-ball crashed through the mud wall, and bounded right across the enclosure.

A bugle sounded shrilly, and the defenders ran to their posts. The wailing of women and the cries of frightened children, helpless creatures only half protected by two barracks situated in the southern corner of the entrenchment, mingled with the din of the answering guns, and in that fatal hour the siege of Cawnpore began.

In the tear-stained story of humanity there has never been aught to surpass the thrilling record of Cawnpore. It contains every element of heroism and tragedy. Four hundred English soldiers, seventy of whom were invalids, with a few dozens of civilians and faithful sepoy—standing behind a breast-high fortification that would not stop a bullet—exposed to the fierce rays of an Indian sun—ill-fed, almost waterless, and driven to numb despair by the sufferings of their loved ones—these men, enduring all and daring all, held at bay four thousand well-armed, well-housed, and well-fed troops for twenty-one days.

Not for a moment was the strain relaxed. Day and night the rebels poured into the entrenchment a ceaseless hail of iron and lead. Cannon-balls, solid and red-hot, shells with carefully-arranged time fuses, and bullets from those selfsame cartridges that the superfine feelings of Brahmin soldiers forbade them to touch, were hurled at the hapless garrison from all quarters.

In the first week every gunner in the place was killed or wounded. Women and children were shot as though they were in the front line of the defence. No corner was safe from the enemy's fire. Every human being behind that absurdly inadequate wall was exposed to constant and equal danger.

Here is an extract from Holmes's history :

"A private was walking with his wife, when a single bullet killed him, broke both her arms, and wounded an infant she was carrying. An officer was talking with a comrade at the main guard when a musket-ball struck him ; and, as he was limping painfully to the barracks to have his wound dressed, Lieutenant Mowbray-Thomson, of the 56th, who was supporting him, was struck also, and both fell helplessly to the ground. Presently, as Thomson lay woefully sick of his

wound, another officer came to condole with him ; and he, too, received a wound from which he died before the end of the siege. Young Godfrey Wheeler, a son of the General, was lying wounded in one of the barracks when a round shot crashed through the walls of the room and carried off his head in the sight of his mother and sisters. Little children straggling outside the wall were deliberately shot down."

On the night of June 11th a red-hot cannon-ball set fire to one of the barracks which was used as a hospital. The flames inspired the enemy's gunners to fresh efforts, and provided them with an excellent target, yet the garrison dared all perils of gun-fire and falling rafters and masonry while they rescued the inmates.

It is on record that the gallant men of the 32nd, when the flames had subsided, though a heavy fusillade was still kept up by the rebels, were seen raking the ashes in order to find their lost medals—the medals they had won in the deadly fighting that preceded the fall of Sevastopol.

On the next day the sepoy army, though so boastful and vain-glorious, dared to make their first attempt to carry the entrenchment by assault. By one bold charge they must have crushed the defenders, if by sheer weight of numbers alone. They advanced with fiendish yells and much seeming confidence. But they could not face those stern warriors who lined the shattered wall. After a short but fierce struggle they fled, leaving the plain littered with corpses.

So the safer bombardment was renewed, its fury envenomed by conscious disparity. Each day the garrison dwindled ; each day the rebels received fresh accessions of strength. Of the few guns mounted in the British

position, one had lost its muzzle, another was thrown from its carriage, two were so battered by the enemy's artillery that they could not be used. The fire had destroyed all the surgical instruments and medical stores, so the wounded had to lie waiting for death, while those living eked out existence on a daily dole of a handful of flour and a few ounces of split peas.

Yet the men of Cawnpore fought on, while their wives and sisters and daughters helped them uncomplainingly, making up packets of ammunition, loading rifles for the men to fire, and even giving their stockings to the gunners to provide cases for grape-shot.

There was only one well inside the entrenchment. Knowing its paramount importance, the rebels mounted guns in such wise that a constant fire could be kept up throughout the night on that special point. Yet there never was lacking a volunteer, either man or woman, to go to that well and obtain the precious water. It remains to this day, a mournful relic of the siege, with its broken gear and shattered circular wall, while the indentations made by such of the cannon-balls as failed to dislodge the masonry are plain to be seen.

The sepoy spared none. Tiny children, tottering to the well in broad daylight, were pelted with musketry. Conceivably, that might be war. There was a deed to come that was not war, but the black horror of abomination, worthy of the excesses of a man-eating tiger, though shorn of the tiger's excuse that he kills in order that he may live. The well in the entrenchment was the Well of Life. It had a companion in Cawnpore that was destined to be the Well of Death.

If proof were needed of the extraordinary condition of

India during the early period of the Mutiny, it was given by an incident that occurred soon after the first assault was beaten off. In broad daylight, while the garrison were maintaining the unceasing duel of cannon and small arms, they were astounded by the spectacle of a British officer galloping across the plain. He was fired at by the sepoys, of course, but horse and man escaped untouched, and the low barrier was leaped without effort.

The new-comer was Lieutenant Bolton, of the 7th Cavalry. Sent out from Lucknow on district duty, he was suddenly deserted by his men, and he rode alone towards Cawnpore, the nearest British station. Unhappily, the story of that adventurous ride is lost for ever. Poor Bolton supplied Cawnpore's last reinforcement.

Sir Hugh Wheeler, ably seconded in the defence by Captain Moore, of the 32nd, sent out emissaries, Eurasians and natives, to seek aid from Lucknow and Allahabad, the one about thirty-five, the other a hundred and ten miles distant. Lawrence wrote "with a breaking heart" that he could spare no troops from Lucknow. The messengers never even reached Allahabad.

On June 23rd, the Nana's hosts again nerved themselves for a desperate attack, and again were they flung off from that tumble-down wall. Then, all their valour fled, they fell back on a foul device. Mrs Jacobi, whom they had taken prisoner, crossed the plain holding a white flag. Wheeler and Moore and other senior officers went to meet her. She carried a letter from Nana Sahib, offering safe-conduct to Allahabad for all the garrison "except those who were connected with the acts of Lord Dalhousie."

Now, Dalhousie resigned the viceroyalty in February 1856. It was he who had refused to continue to Nana Sahib the Peishwa's pension; assuredly there was none in Cawnpore responsible for the acts of a former viceroy. At any rate, whatsoever that curious reservation meant, the majority of the staff were opposed to surrender.

Unfortunately, Captain Moore, whose bravery was in the mouths of all, who, though wounded and ill, had been "the life and soul of the defence," persuaded Sir Hugh Wheeler and the others that an honourable capitulation was their sole resource. Succour could not arrive, he argued, and they were in duty bound to save the surviving civilians and the women and children.

So an armistice was agreed to on June 26th, and representatives of both sides met to discuss terms. It was arranged that the garrison should evacuate their position, surrender their guns and treasure, retain their rifles and a quantity of ammunition, and be provided with river transport to Allahabad.

The Nana asked that the defenders should march out that night. Wheeler refused.

"I shall renew the bombardment, and put every one of you to death in a few days," threatened the Brahmin.

"Try it," said the Englishman. "I still have enough powder left to blow both armies into the air."

But the Nana meant not to have any more fighting on equal terms. He signed the treaty, the guns were given up, and on the night of June 26th peace reigned within the ruined entrenchment.

Next morning that glorious garrison quitted the shot-

torn plain they had hallowed by their deeds. And even the rebels pitied them. "As the wan and ragged column filed along the road, the women and children in bullock-carriages or on elephants, the wounded in palanquins, the fighting men on foot, sepoy came clustering round the officers they had betrayed, and talked in wonder and admiration of the surpassing heroism of the defence."

Those men of the rank and file at least were soldiers. They knew nothing of the awful project concocted by the Nana and his chief associates, Rao-sahib, Tantia Topi, Tika Singh, and Azim Ullah.

The procession made its way slowly towards the river, three-quarters of a mile to the east. No doubt there were joyful hearts even in that sorrow-laden band. Men and women must have thought of far-off homes in England and hoped that God would spare them to see their beloved country once more.

Even the children, wide-eyed innocents, could not fail to be thankful that the noise of the guns had ceased, while the wounded were cheered by the belief that food and stores in plenty would soon be available.

At the foot of a tree-clad ravine leading to the Ganges were stationed a number of heavy native boats, with thatched roofs to shield the occupants from the sun. They were partly drawn up on the mud at the water's edge to render easy the work of embarkation. Without hurry or confusion, the wounded and the women and children were placed on board.

Then someone noticed that the thatch on some of the boats was smoking, and it was found that glowing charcoal had been thrust into the straw. About the same

time it was discovered that the boats had neither oars, nor rudders, nor supplies of food.

Before the dread significance of these things became clear a bugle-call rang out. At once both banks of the river became alive with armed sepoy, and a murderous rifle-fire was opened on the crowded boats. Guns hidden among the trees belched red-hot shot and grape, and the smouldering straw of the thatched roofs burst into flame.

Awakened to the unspeakable treachery of their foe, officers and men rushed into the river and strove with might and main to shove the boats into deep water. They failed, for the unwieldy craft had been hauled purposely too high.

Here Ashe and Moore and Bolton, hero of that lonely ride through the enemy's country, fell. Here, too, men shot their own wives and children rather than permit them to fall into the hands of the fiends who had planned the massacre. Savage troopers urged their horses into the water and slashed cowering women with their sabres. Infants were torn from their mothers' arms and tossed by sepoy from bayonet to bayonet. The sick and wounded, lying helpless in the burning craft, died in the agony of fire, and the few bold spirits who, even in that ghastly hour, tried to beat off their cowardly assailants, were surrounded and shot down by overwhelming numbers.

One heavily-laden boat was dragged into the stream, and a few officers and men clambered on board. The voyage they made would supply material for an epic. They were followed along the banks and pursued by armed craft on the river. They fought all day and

throughout the night, and when the ungoverned boat ran ashore at daybreak the surviving soldiers, a sergeant and eleven men, headed by Mowbray-Thomson, of the 56th, and Delafosse, of the 53rd, sprang out and charged some hundreds of sepoy and hostile villagers who had gathered on the bank.

The craven-hearted crew yielded before the Englishmen's fierce onslaught. The tiny band turned to fight their way back, and found that the boat had drifted off again! Then they seized a Hindu temple on the bank, and held it until the sepoy piled burning timber against the rear walls and threw bags of powder on the fire.

Fixing bayonets, and leaving the sergeant dead in the doorway, they charged again into the mass of the enemy. Six fell. The remainder reached the river, threw aside their guns, and boldly plunged in. Two were shot while swimming, and one man, unable to swim any distance, coolly made his way ashore again and faced his murderers until he yielded to their blows.

Mowbray-Thomson, Delafosse, and Privates Murphy and Sullivan swam six miles with the stream, and were finally rescued and helped by a friendly native.

Those four were all who came alive out of the Inferno of Cawnpore. The boat they had left was captured by the mutineers. Major Vibart, of the 2nd Cavalry, who was so severely wounded that he could not join in the earlier fighting, and some eighty helpless souls under his command, were brought back to the city of death.

There, by orders of the Nana, the men were slain forthwith, and the women and children were taken to a building in which they found one hundred and twenty-five others who had been spared, for the

Brahmin's own terrible purposes, from the butchery at Massacre Ghat on the 27th.

Returning to Bithoor, the Nana was proclaimed Peishwa amid the booming of cannon and the plaudits of his retainers. He passed a week in drunken revels and debauchery, and when a small company of European fugitives from Fategarh sought refuge at Cawnpore, in ignorance of its fate, he amused himself by having all the men but three killed in his presence.

These three, and the women and children who accompanied them, were sent to a small house known as the Bibigarh, in which the whole of the captives, now numbering two hundred and eleven, were imprisoned.

Many died, and they were happiest. The survivors were subjected to every indignity, given the coarsest food, and forced to grind corn for their conqueror, who early in July took up his abode in a large building at Cawnpore overlooking the house in which the unhappy people were penned.

But the period of their earthly sufferings was drawing to a close. An avenging army was moving swiftly up the Grand Trunk Road from Allahabad. The Nana's nephew and two of his lieutenants, leading a large force against the British, were badly defeated. On July 15th came the alarming tidings that the Feringhis were only a day's march from the city.

The Furies must have chosen that date. The Nana, the man who thought himself fit to be a king, decided that Havelock would turn back if there were no more English left in Cawnpore! So, as a preliminary to the greater tragedy, the five men who had escaped death thus far were brought forth and slaughtered at the feet

of the renowned Peishwa. Then a squad of sepoy were told to "shoot all the women and children in the Bibigarh through the windows of the house."

Poor wretches—they were afraid to refuse, yet their gorge rose at the deed, and they fired at the ceiling!

Such weakness was annoying to the puissant Brahmin. He selected two Mohammedan butchers, an Afghan, and two out-caste Hindus, to do his bidding. Armed with long knives, these five fiends entered the shambles. Alas, how can the scene that followed be described!

Yet not even then was the sacrifice complete. Some who were wounded but not killed, a few children who crept under the garments of their dead mothers, lived until the morning.

Not all the native soldiers were so lost to human sympathies that they did not shudder at the groans and muffled cries that came all night from the house of sorrow. Some of them have left records of sights and sounds too horrible to translate from their Eastern tongue.

But the rumble of distant guns told the destroyer that his short-lived hour of triumph was nearly sped. In a paroxysm of rage and fear he gave the final order, and the Well of Cawnpore thereby attained its ghastly immortality. By his command all that piteous company of women and children, the living and the dead together, were thrown into a deep well that stood in the garden of Bibigarh—the "House of the Woman." A few tiny mites of children and about a dozen women who had hidden themselves under the corpses of the slain were hunted out and murdered. Some of the children were even baited from corner to corner of the compound and

chased round a *mulsari* tree that stood in the courtyard, until the ogres tired of the sport and hacked their heads in two.

This is history, not romance. Nana Sahib and the guards alone witnessed the greater holocaust of the previous evening, but this final scene was watched by a crowd of natives. When all was ended, the well was filled with bodies to within six feet of the top.

It was thus that Nana Sahib strove to cloak his crime. Yet never did foul murderer flaunt deed more glaringly in the face of Heaven. Fifty years have passed, myriads of human beings have lived and died, since the well swallowed the Nana's victims, but the memory of those gracious women, of those golden-haired children, of those dear little infants born while the guns thundered around the entrenchment, shall endure for ever. The Nana sought oblivion and forgetfulness for his sin. He earned the anger of the gods and the malediction of the world, then and for all time.

CHAPTER VII

TO LUCKNOW

THE tragedy of Massacre Ghat, intensified by the crowning infamy of the well, brought a new element into the struggle. Hitherto not one European in a hundred in India regarded the Mutiny as other than a local, though serious, attempt to revive a fallen dynasty.

The excesses at Meerut, Delhi, and other towns were looked upon as the work of unbridled mobs. Sepoys who revolted and shot their officers came under a different category from the slayers of tender women and children. But the planned and ordered treachery of Cawnpore changed all that. Thenceforth every British-born man in the country not only realised that the Government had been forced into a Titanic contest, but he was also swayed by a personal and absorbing lust for vengeance.

Officers and men, regulars and volunteers alike, took the field with the fixed intent of exacting an expiatory life for each hair on the head of those unhappy victims. And they kept the vow they made. To this day, though half a century has passed, the fertile plain of the Doab—that great tract between the Ganges and the Jumna—is dotted with the ruins of gutted towns and depopulated villages. But that was not yet. India was fated to be almost lost before it was won again.

On the night of June 4th, when the roomy budgerow

carrying Winifred Mayne and her escort drifted away from the walls of the Nana's palace at Bithoor, there was not a breath of wind on the river. The mat sail was useless, but a four-mile-an-hour current carried the unwieldy craft slowly down-stream, and there was not the slightest doubt in the minds of either of the Englishmen on board as to their course of action.

Mr Mayne was acquainted with Cawnpore, and Sir Hugh Wheeler was an old friend of his.

"Wheeler has no great force at his disposal," said he to Malcolm. "It is evident that the native regiments have just broken out here, but by this time our people in the cantonment must have heard of events elsewhere, and they have surely seized the magazine, which is well fortified and stands on the river. If I can believe a word that the Nana said, the sepoy will rush off to Delhi to-night, just as they did at Meerut, Aligarh, and Etawah. I am convinced that our best plan is to hug the right bank and disembark near the magazine."

"Is it far?" asked Malcolm.

"About eight miles."

"I wonder why the Begum was so insistent that we should go back along the Grand Trunk Road?"

Mayne hesitated. He knew that Winifred was listening.

"It is hard to account for the vagaries of a woman's mind, or, shall I say, of the mind of such a woman," he answered lightly. "You will remember that when you came to our assistance outside Meerut she was determined to take us, willy-nilly, to Delhi."

Malcolm, who had heard Roshinara's impassioned speech and looked into her blazing eyes, thought that

her motives were stronger than mere caprice. He never dreamed of the true reason, but he feared that she knew Cawnpore had fallen, and her curiously friendly regard for himself might have inspired her advice. Here, again, Winifred's presence tied his tongue.

"Well," he said, with a cheerless laugh, "I, at any rate, must endeavour to reach Wheeler. I am supposed to be bearing despatches, but they were taken from me when I was knocked off my horse in the village—"

"Were you attacked?" asked Winifred, and the quiet solicitude in her voice was sweetest music in her lover's ears.

His brief recital of the night's adventures was followed by Mayne's story of the journey and subsequent detention at Bithoor.

It may be thought that such a man, with his long experience of India, should have read more clearly the sinister lesson to be derived from the treatment meted out that night to a British officer by the detachment of sowars, amplified, as it was, by their open references to the Nana as a Maharajah. But he was not yet disillusioned. And if his judgment were at fault, he erred in good company, for Sir Henry Lawrence, Chief Commissioner at Lucknow, was even then resisting the appeals, the almost insubordinate urging, of the headstrong Martin Gubbins that the sepoys in the capital of Oudh should be disarmed.

Meanwhile the boat lurched onward. Soon a red glow in the sky proclaimed that they were nearing Cawnpore. Though well aware that the European houses were on fire, they were confident that the magazine would be held. They helped Akhab Khan, Chumru,

and the two troopers to rig a pair of long sweeps, and prepared to guide the budgerow to the landing-place.

Winifred was stationed at the rudder. As it chanced, the three sowars took one oar and Chumru helped the sahibs with the other, and the two sets of rowers were partly screened from each other by the horses. Malcolm was saying something to Winifred, when the native bent near him and whispered—

“Talk on, sahib, but listen! Your men intend to jump ashore and leave you. They have been bitten by the wolf. Don’t try to stop them. Name of Allah, let them go!”

Frank’s heart throbbed under this dramatic development. He had no reason to doubt his servant’s statement. The faithful fellow had nursed him through a fever with the devotion of a brother, and Malcolm had reciprocated this fidelity by refusing to part with him when he, in turn, was stricken down by smallpox.

In fact, Frank was the only European in Meerut who would employ the man, whose extraordinary appearance went against him. Cross-eyed, wide-mouthed, and broken-nosed, with a straggling black beard that ill concealed the tokens on his face of the dread disease from which he had suffered, Chumru looked a cut-throat of the worst type, “a hungry, lean-fac’d villain, a mere anatomy.”

Aware of his own ill-repute, he made the most of it. He tied his turban with an aggressive twist, and was wont to scowl so vindictively at the mess khamsamah that his master, quite unconsciously, always secured the wing of a chicken, or the best cut of the joint.

Yet this gnome-like creature was true to his salt at a

time when he must have felt that his sahib, together with every other sahib in India, was doomed ; his eyes now shot fiery, if oblique, shafts of indignation as he muttered his thrilling news.

Malcolm did not attempt to question him. He glanced at the sowars, and saw that their carbines were slung across their shoulders. Chumru interpreted the look correctly.

"Akhab Khan prevented those Shia dogs from shooting you and Mayne-sahib," went on the low murmur. "They said, huzoor, that the Nana wanted the miss-sahib, and that they were fools to help you in taking her away, but Akhab Khan swore he would fight on your honour's side if they unslung their guns. They do not know I heard them, as I was sitting behind the mast, and I took care to creep off when their heads were turned toward the shore."

"Here we are," cried Mayne, who little guessed what Chumru's mumbling portended. "There is the ghat.¹ If it were not for the mist we could see the magazine just below on the left."

Assuredly Frank Malcolm's human clay was being tested in the furnace that night. He had to decide instantly what line to follow. In a minute or less the boat would bump against the lowermost steps, and if Akhab Khan and his companions were indeed traitors, the others on board were completely at their mercy. Mayne was unarmed, Chumru's fighting equipment lay wholly in his aspect, while Malcolm's revolvers were in the holsters and his sword was tied to Nejdi's saddle, its

¹ In this instance, steps leading down to the river ; also a mountain range.

scabbard and belt having been thrown aside while Abdul Huq was robbing him.

The broad-beamed budgerow presented a strangely accurate microcosm of India at that moment. The English people on her deck were numerically inferior to the natives, and deprived, by accident, of the arms that might have equalised matters.

Their little army was breathing mutiny, but was itself divided, if Chumru were not mistaken, seeing that all were for revolt, but one held out that the Feringhis' lives should be spared. And even there the cruel dilemma that offered itself to the ruler of every European community in the country was not to be avoided, for if Malcolm tried to obtain his weapons his action might be the signal for a murderous attack, while if he made no move he left it entirely at the troopers' discretion whether or not he and Mayne should be shot down without the power to strike a blow in self-defence.

Luckily he had the gift of prompt decision that is nine-tenths of generalship. Saying not a word to alarm Mayne, who was still weak from the wound received an hour earlier, he crossed the deck, halting on the way to rub Nejdi's black muzzle.

The sowars were watching him. With steady thrust of the port sweep they were heading the budgerow toward the ghat.

He went nearer and caught the end of the heavy oar.

"Pull hard, now," he said encouragingly, "and we will be out of the current."

He was facing the three men, and his order was a quite natural one under the circumstances. Obviously

he meant to help. Stretching their arms for a long and strong stroke, they laid on with a will.

Instantly he pressed the oar downwards, thus forcing the blade out of the water, and threw all his strength into its unexpected yielding. Before they could so much as utter a yell, Akhab Khan and another were swept headlong into the river, while the third man lay on his back on the deck with Frank on top of him. The simplicity of the manœuvre ensured its success. Neither Mayne nor Winifred understood what had happened until Malcolm had disarmed the trooper, taken his cartridge pouch, and thrown him overboard, to sink or swim as fate might direct. He regretted the loss of Akhab Khan, but he recalled the queer expression on the man's face when he read Bahadur Shah's sonorous titles—

“Light of the World, Renowned King of Kings, Lord of all India, Fuzl-Ilahi, Panah-i-din!”

That appeal to the Faith was too powerful to be withstood. Yet Malcolm was glad the man had been chivalrous in his fall, for he had taken a liking to him.

Chumaru, of course, after the first gasp of surprise, appreciated the sahib's strategy.

“Shabash!” he cried. “Wao, wao, huzoor!¹ May I never see the White Pond of the Prophet if that was not well planned.”

“Oh, what is it?” came Winifred's startled exclamation. It was so dark, and the horses, no less than the sail, so obscured her view of the fore part of the boat, that she could only dimly make out Malcolm's figure,

¹ “Bravo! Well done, your honour!”

though the sound of the scuffle and splashing were unmistakable.

"We are disbanding our native forces—that is all," said Frank. "Press the tiller more to the left, please. Yes, that is right. Now keep it there until we touch the steps."

The shimmering surface of the river near the boat was broken up into ripples surrounding a black object. Malcolm heard the quick panting of one in whose lungs water had mixed with air, and he hated to think of even a rebel drowning before his eyes. Moved by pity, he swung the big oar on its wooden rest until the blade touched the exhausted man, whose hands shot out in the hope of succour. After some spluttering, a broken voice supplicated—

"Mercy, sahib! I saved you when you were in my power. Show pity now to me."

"It is true, then, that you meant to desert, Akhab Khan?" said Frank, sternly.

"Yes, sahib. One cannot fight against one's brothers, but I swear by the Prophet—"

"Nay, your oaths are not needed. You at least did not wish to commit murder. Cling to that oar. The ghat is close at hand."

"Then, sahib, I can still show my gratitude. If you would save the miss-sahib, do not land here. The magazine has been taken. The cavalry have looted the Treasury. All the sahib-log are killed."

"Is this a true thing that thou sayest?"

"May I drop back into the pit if it be not the tale we heard at Bithoor!"

By this time Mayne was at Frank's side.

"I fear we have fallen into a hornet's nest," said he. "There is certainly an unusual turmoil in the bazaar, and houses are on fire in all directions."

Even while they were listening to the fitful bellowing of a distant mob bent on mad revel, a crackle of musketry rang out, but died away as quickly. The budgerow grounded lightly when her prow ran against the stonework of the ghat. Again did Malcolm make up his mind on the spur of the moment.

"I will spare your life on one condition, Akhab Khan," he said. "Go ashore and learn what has taken place at the magazine. Return here, alone, within five minutes. Mark you, I say 'alone.' If I see more than one who comes, I shall shoot."

"Huzoor, I shall not betray you."

"Go, then."

He drew the man through the water until his feet touched the steps. Climbing up unsteadily, Akhab Khan disappeared in the gloom. Then they waited, in silence. The heavy breath of the bazaar was pungent in their nostrils, and for a few seconds they listened to the trooper's retreating footsteps. Frank leaped ashore and pushed the boat off, while Mayne held her by jamming the leeward oar into the mud. It was best to make sure.

They did not speak. Their ears were strained as their tumultuous thoughts. At last someone came, a man, and his firm tread of boot-shod feet betokened a soldier. It was the rebel who had become their scout.

"Sahib," said he, "it is even as I told you. Cawn-pore is lost to you."

"And you, Akhab Khan, do you go or stay?"

There was another moment of tense silence.

"Would you have me draw sword against the men of my own faith?" was the despairing answer.

"It would not be for the first time," said Malcolm, coldly. "But I could never trust thee again. Yet hast thou chosen wrongly, Akhab Khan. When thy day of reckoning comes, may it be remembered in thy favour that thou didst turn most unwillingly against thy masters!"

Akhab Khan raised his right hand in a military salute. Suddenly his erect form became indistinct, and faded out of sight. The boat was travelling down stream once more. Around her the river lapped lazily, and the solemn quietude of the mist-covered waters was accentuated by the far-off turmoil in the city.

The huge sail thrust its yard high above the fog-bank, and watchers on the riverside saw it. Someone hailed in the vernacular, and Chumru replied that they came from Bithoor with hay. Prompted by Malcolm, he went on—

"How goes the good work, brother?"

"Rarely," came the voice. "I have already requited two bunniahs to whom I owed money. Gold is to be had for the taking. Leave thy budgerow at the bridge, friend, and join us."

The raucous, half-drunken accents substantiated Akhab Khan's story. The unseen speaker was evidently himself a boatman. He was rejoicing in the upheaval that permitted debts to be paid with a bludgeon and money to be made without toil.

Mayne caught Frank by the arm.

"We are drifting towards the bridge of boats that

carries the road to Lucknow across the river," he said in the hurried tone of a man who sees a new and paralysing danger. "There is a drawbridge for river traffic, but how shall we find it, and, in any event, we must be seen."

"Are there many houses on the opposite bank?" asked Malcolm.

"Not many. They are mostly mud hovels. What is in your mind?"

"We might endeavour to cross the river before we reach the bridge. By riding boldly along the Lucknow road we shall place many miles between ourselves and Cawnpore before day breaks."

"That certainly seems to offer our best chance. We have plenty of horses, and we ought to be in Lucknow soon after dawn."

"What if matters are as bad there?"

"Impossible! Lawrence has a whole regiment with him, the 32nd, and plenty of guns. Poor Wheeler at Cawnpore commanded a *depôt*, mostly officials on the staff and invalids. At any rate, Malcolm, we *must* have some objective. Lucknow spells hope. Neither Meerut nor Allahabad is attainable. And what will become of Winifred if we fail to reach some station that still holds out?"

The girl herself now came to them.

"I refuse to remain all alone any longer," she said. "I don't know a quarter of what is going on. I have tied the tiller with a rope. Please tell me what is happening, and why a man shouted to Chumru from the bank."

She spoke calmly, with the pleasantly modulated voice

of a well-bred Englishwoman. If aught were wanted to enhance the contrast between the peace of the river and the devildom of Cawnpore it was given in full measure by her presence there.

How little did she realise the long-drawn-out agony that was even then beginning for her sisters in that ill-fated entrenchment! It was the idle whim of fortune that she was not with them. And not one was destined to live—not one among hundreds!

But it was a time for action, not for speech. Malcolm asked her gently to go back to the helm and keep it jammed hard a-starboard until they arrived at the left bank. Then he took an oar, and Mayne and Chumru tackled the other. The three men pulled manfully athwart the stream. They could not tell what progress they were making, and the Ganges ran swiftly in mid-channel, being five times as wide as the Thames at London Bridge. Yet they toiled on with desperate energy. They had crossed the swirl of deep water, when a low, straight-edged barrier appeared on the starboard side, and before they could attempt to avert the calamity the budgerow crashed against a pontoon and drove its bows under the superstructure. It was locked there so firmly that a score of men had to labour for hours next day ere it could be cleared.

Nevertheless, that which they regarded as a misfortune was a blessing. The shock of the collision alarmed the horses, and one of them climbed like a cat on to the bridge. Frank sprang after him, and caught the reins before the startled creature could break away. And that which one horse could do might be done by seven. Bidding Chumru arrange some planks to give the others

better foothold, he told Winifred and Mayne to join him and help in holding the animals as they gained the roadway.

A couple of natives who ran up from the Lucknow side were peremptorily ordered to stand. Indeed, they were harmless coolies, and soon they offered to assist, for the deadly work in Cawnpore that night was scarcely known to them as yet. In a couple of minutes the fugitives were mounted, each of the men leading a spare horse. They advanced at a steady trot, though the bridge swayed and creaked a good deal under this forbidden pace, and soon found by the upward grade that they were crossing the sloping mudbank leading to the actual highway.

Thirty-five miles of an excellent road now separated them from Lucknow. The hour was not late, about half-past ten, so they had fully six hours of starlit obscurity in which to travel, because, though the month was June, India is not favoured with the prolonged twilight of dawn and eve familiar to other latitudes.

They clattered through the outlying bazaar without disturbing a soul. Probably every man, woman, and child able to walk was adding to the din in the great city beyond the river. Pariah dogs yelped at them, some heavy carts drawn across the road caused a momentary halt, and a herd of untended buffaloes lying patiently near their byre told the story of the excitement that had drawn their keeper across the bridge.

Soon they were in the open, and a fast canter became permissible. They passed by many a temple devoted to Kali or elephant-headed Buddha, by many a sacred mosque or tomb of Mohammedan saint, by many a

holy tree decorated with ribbons in honour of its tutelary deity.

Now they were flying between lanes of sugar-cane or tall castor-oil plants, now traversing arid spaces where *reh*, the efflorescent salt of the earth, had killed all vegetation and reduced a once fertile land to a desert.

Five miles from Cawnpore they swept through the hamlet of Mungulwar. They saw no one, and no one seemed to see them, though it is hard to say in India what eyes may not be peering through wattle-screen or heavy-barred door.

In the larger village of Onao they met a group of chowkidars, or watchmen, in the main street. These men salaamed to the sahib-log, probably on account of the stir created by the horses. Without drawing rein, they pushed on to Busseerutunge, crossed the river Sai, and neared the village of Bunnee.

If only men could read the future, how Malcolm's soldier spirit would have kindled as Mayne told him the names of those squalid communities! Each yard of that road was destined to be sprinkled with British blood, while its ditches would be choked with the bodies of mutineers.

But these things were behind the veil, and the one dominant thought possessing Malcolm now was that unless Winifred and her uncle obtained food of some sort they must fall from their saddles through sheer exhaustion. He and his servant had made a substantial meal early in the evening, but the others had eaten nothing, owing to the alarm and confusion that reigned at Bithoor.

Winifred, indeed, in response to a question, said

faintly that she thought she could keep going if she had a drink of milk. Such an admission, coming from her brave lips, warned Frank that he must call a halt, regardless of loss of time. Assuredly this was an occasion when the sacrifice of a few minutes might avoid the grave risk of a breakdown after daybreak. So when they entered Bunnee they pulled up, and discussed ways and means of getting something to eat.

It was then that Malcolm gave evidence that his devotion to the soldier's art had not been practised in vain. Mr Mayne thought they should rouse the household at the first reputable-looking dwelling they found.

"No," said Frank. "Mounted and in motion we have some chance of escape, unless we fall in with hostile cavalry. On foot we are at the mercy of any prowling rascals who may be on the war-path. Let us rather look out for a place somewhat removed from the main road. There we do not court observation, and we are sufficiently well armed to protect ourselves from any hostile move on the part of those we arouse."

The older man agreed. Rank and wealth count for little in the great crises of life. Here was a Judicial Commissioner of Oudh a fugitive in his own province, and ready to obey a subaltern's slightest wish!

Chumru quickly picked out the house of a zamindar, or landowner, which stood in its own walled enclosure behind a clump of trees. A rough track led to the gate, and Frank knocked loudly on an iron-studded door.

He used the butt-end of a revolver, so his rat-tat was imperative enough, but the garden might have been a graveyard for all the notice that was taken by the inhabitants. He knocked again with equal vehemence, and

with the same result. But he knew his zamindar, and after waiting a reasonable interval he said clearly—

“Unless the door is opened at once it will be forced. I am an officer of the Company, and I demand an entry.”

“Coming, sahib,” said an anxious voice. “We knew not who knocked, and there are many budmashes about these nights.”

The door yielded to the withdrawal of bolts, but it was still held on a chain. A man peeped out, satisfied himself that there really were sahib-log waiting at his gate, and then unfastened the chain, with apologies for his forgetfulness.

Three men-servants, armed with lathis—long sticks with heavy iron ferrules at both ends—stood behind him, and they all appeared to be exceedingly relieved when they heard that their midnight visitors only asked for water, milk, eggs, and chupatties, on the score that they were belated and had no food.

The zamindar civilly invited them to enter, but Frank as civilly declined, fearing that the smallness of their number, the absence of a retinue, and the cavalry accoutrements of the horses might arouse comment, if not suspicion.

Happily the owner of the house recognised Mr Mayne, and then he bestirred himself. All they sought for, and more, was brought. Chairs were provided—rare luxuries in native dwellings at that date—and, this being a Mohammedan family, some excellent cooked meat was added to the feast. Before long Winifred was able to smile and say that she had not been so disgracefully hungry since she left school.

The zamindar courteously insisted that they should taste some mangoes, on which he prided himself, and he also staged a quantity of *lichis*, a delicious fruit, closely resembling a plover's egg in appearance, peculiar to India. Nor were the horses forgotten. They were watered and fed, and if by this time the nature of the cavalcade had been recognised, there was no change in the man's hospitable demeanour.

Not for an instant did Frank's watchful attitude relax. While Mr Mayne and the zamindar discoursed on the disturbed state of the country, he snatched the opportunity to exchange a few tender words with Winifred. But his eyes and ears were alert, and he was the first to hear the advent of a large body of horse along the main road.

He stood up instantly, blew out a lantern which was placed on the ground for the benefit of himself and the others, and said quietly—

“A regiment of cavalry is approaching. We do not wish to be seen by them. Let no man stir or show a light until they have gone.”

He had the military trick of putting an emphatic order in the fewest and simplest words. A threat was out of the question after the manner in which the party had been received, but it is likely that each native present felt that his life would not be of great value if he attempted to draw the attention of the passers-by to the presence of Europeans at the door of that secluded zamindari.

The tramp of horses' feet and the jingle of arms and trappings could now be distinguished plainly. At first Winifred feared that they were troops sent in pursuit

of them by the Nana, and she whispered the question—

“Are they from Cawnpore?”

“No,” he answered, placing a reassuring hand on her shoulder. “I cannot see them, but their horses are walking, so they cannot have come our way. They are cavalry advancing from the direction of Lucknow.”

“Perhaps they are marching to the relief of Cawnpore?”

“Let us hope so. But we must not risk being seen.”

“Your words are despondent, dear. Do you think the whole native army is against us?”

“I scarcely know what to think, sweetheart. Things look black in so many directions. Once we are in Lucknow and able to hear what has really happened elsewhere, we shall be better able to judge.”

The ghostly squadrons clanked past, unseen and unseeing. When the road was quiet again, Winifred and her small bodyguard remounted. The zamindar was not a man who would accept payment, so Mr Mayne gave his servants some money.

It may be that this Mohammedan gentleman wondered if he had acted rightly when the emissaries of the Nana scoured the country next day for news of the miss-sahib and two sahibs who rode towards Lucknow in the small hours of the morning. Being a wise man, he held his peace. He had cast his bread upon the waters, and did not regret it, though he little reckoned on the return it would make after many days.

Reinvigorated by the excellent meal, the travellers found that their horses had benefited as greatly as they themselves by the food and brief rest.

They had no more adventures on the way. Winifred did not object to riding astride while it was dark, but she did not like the experience in broad daylight, and when they met a Eurasian in a tikka-gharry, or hired conveyance, in the environs of Lucknow, she was almost as delighted to secure the vehicle as to learn that the city, though disturbed, was "quite safe from mutiny."

That was the man's phrase, and it was eloquent of faith in the genius of Henry Lawrence.

"Quite safe!" he assured them, though they had only escaped capture by a detachment of rebel cavalry by the merest fluke three hours earlier.

They were standing opposite the gate of a great walled inclosure known as the Alumbagh, a summer retreat built by an old nawab for a favourite wife. And that was in June! In six short months Havelock would be lying there in his grave, and men would be talking from pole to pole of the wondrous things done at Lucknow, both by those who held it and those who twice relieved it.

"Quite safe!"

It was high time men ceased to use that phrase in India.



CHAPTER VIII

WHEREIN A MOHAMMEDAN FRATERNISES WITH A BRAHMIN

"WE seem to be attracting a fair share of attention," said Malcolm, as they crossed a bridge over the canal that bounded Lucknow on the south and east.

"We look rather odd, don't we?" asked Winifred, cheerfully. "Three mounted men leading four horses, and a dishevelled lady in a ramshackle vehicle like this, would draw the eyes of a mob anywhere. Thank goodness, though, the people appear to be quite peaceably inclined."

"Y—yes."

"Why do you agree so grudgingly?"

"Well, I have not been here before—are the streets usually crowded at this hour?"

"Lucknow, like every other Indian city, is early astir. Perhaps they have heard of the fall of Cawnpore. It is one of the marvels of India how quickly news spreads. Isn't that so, uncle?"

"No man knows how rumour travels here," said Mr Mayne. "It beats the telegraph at times. But the probability is that Lucknow has surprises in store for us. While we were bottled up in Bithoor, things have been happening elsewhere."

His guess was only too accurate. Not only had Nana Sahib long been in treaty with the disaffected

Oudh taluqdars, but Lucknow itself was writhing in the first stages of rebellion.

Although, by popular reckoning, the Mutiny broke out at Meerut on May 10th, there was trouble in Lucknow in April with the 48th Infantry, and again on May 3rd, when Lawrence's firm measures alone prevented the 7th Oudh Irregulars from murdering their officers.

There was little reason to hope that this, the third city in India, should not yield readily to sedition-mongers. The dethroned King of Oudh, with his courtiers and ministers, still maintained a sort of royal state in his residence at Calcutta, and his emissaries were active in the greased cartridge propaganda, telling Hindus that the paper wrappers were dipped in the fat of cows, while, for the benefit of Mohammedans, a variant of the story was supplied by the substitution of pig's lard.

It is believed, too, that the passing of a chupatty, or flat cake, from village to village in the North-West Provinces early in January, was set on foot by one of these agitators as a token that the Government were plotting to overthrow the religions of the people.

The exact significance of that mysterious symbol has never been ascertained. Like the "snowball" petition of the West, once started, it soon lost its first meaning. Many natives regarded it merely as the fulfilment of a devotee's vow, but in the majority of instances it had an unsettling effect on the simple folk who received it, and this was precisely what its originator desired.

Lucknow was not only the natural pivot of a rich agricultural district, but it hummed with prosperous trade. Every type of Indian humanity gathered in its

narrow streets and lofty houses, and excitement rose to fever-heat when the local trouble with the sepoy was given force to by the isolation of the Meerut white garrison, the seizure of Delhi, and the sacking of many European stations in the North-West.

On May 30th, the 71st Native Infantry had the impudence to fire on the 32nd Foot, and were severely mauled for their pains. They ran off, but not until they had murdered Brigadier-General Handscombe and Lieutenant Grant, one of their own officers. The standard of the Prophet was raised in the bazaar, and a fanatical mob rallied round it. They killed a Mr Menpes, who lived in the city, and were then dispersed by the police.

Unfortunately, the 7th Cavalry deserted when Havelock marched to the racecourse next day to punish the mutinous sepoy who had gathered there. But, despite the lack of a mounted force, a number of prisoners were taken, and hanged in batches on a gallows erected on the Muchee Bhowun, a fortress palace situated near the Residency.

Thus, Lawrence had scotched the snake, but, like Wheeler at Cawnpore, and many another in India at that time, he refused to kill it by disarming the native regiments under his command. Nevertheless, they feared him. They dared not show their fangs in Lucknow. They stole away in companies and squadrons, glutting their predatory instincts by slaughter and pillage elsewhere before they headed for Delhi, or joined one of the numerous pretenders who sprang into being in emulation of Nana Sahib.

It was one of these rebel detachments that passed the

four fugitives from Cawnpore on the outskirts of Bunnee. Scattered throughout the province, they proved as merciless and terrible to wealthy natives as to the Europeans whom they met in flight along the main roads.

The chaos into which the whole country fell with such extraordinary swiftness is demonstrated by the varying treatment meted out to different people. Winifred and her uncle, under Malcolm's bold leadership, reached Lucknow with comparative ease. Poor little Sophy Christian, aged three, having lost her mother in the massacre of Sitapore, was taken off into the jungle by Sir Mountstuart Jackson, his sister Madeline, a young officer named Burnes, and Surgeon-Major Morton. They fell in with Captain and Mrs Philip Orr and their child, refugees from Aurungabad, and the whole party experienced almost incredible sufferings *during nine months*.

Mrs Orr, her little girl, and Miss Jackson did not escape from their final prison at Lucknow until the end of March, 1858. Sophy Christian, who was always asking pathetically, "why mummie didn't come," died of the hardships she had to endure, while the men were shot in cold blood by the sepoys on November 16th.

Yet, in many instances, the rebels either told their officers to go away, or escorted them to the nearest European station, while the villagers, though usually hostile, sometimes treated the luckless sahib-log with genuine kindness and sympathy.

Mr Mayne, of course, had his own house in the cantonment, which was situated north of the city, across the river Goomtee. Malcolm wished to see uncle and

niece safely established in their bungalow before he reported himself at the Residency, but the older man thought they should all go straight to the Chief Commissioner, and tell him what had happened at Cawnpore.

Threading the packed bazaar towards the Bailey Guard—that gate of the Residency which was destined to become for ever famous—they encountered Captain Gould Weston, the local Superintendent of Police, and his first words undeceived them as to the true position of affairs.

“You left Cawnpore last night!” he cried. “Then you were amazingly lucky. Wheeler has just telegraphed that he expects to be invested by the rebels to-day. Not that you will be much better off here in some respects, as we are all living in the Residency. I suppose you know your house has gone, Mayne.”

“Gone! Do you mean that it is destroyed?”

“Burnt to the ground. There is hardly a building left in the cantonment.”

“But what were the troops doing? At any rate, you are not besieged here yet.”

“We are on the verge of it. Unfortunately, the Chief won’t bring himself to disarm the sepoys, and the city is drifting into a worse condition daily. Half of the native corps have bolted, and the rest are ripe for trouble at the first opportunity. The fires are the work of incendiaries. We have caught and hanged a few, but they are swarming everywhere.”

“You say Wheeler has been in communication with you this morning,” said the perplexed civilian. “Are you sure? It is true we escaped, in the first instance,

from Bithoor, but Cawnpore was in flames last night, and the magazine in possession of the mutineers."

"Oh, yes. We know that. The one thing these black rascals don't understand is the importance of cutting the telegraph wires. Wheeler has thrown up an entrenchment in the middle of a *maidan*. I am afraid he is in a tight place, as he is asking for help which we cannot send. Well, good-bye! Hope to see you at tiffin. Miss Mayne must make herself as comfortable as she can in the women's quarters, and pray, like the rest of us, that this storm may soon blow over."

He rode off, followed by an escort of mounted police. Malcolm, who had taken no part in the conversation, listened to Weston's words with a sinking heart. He had failed doubly, then, in the mission entrusted to him by Colvin. Not only were his despatches lost, but he was mistaken in believing that the Cawnpore garrison was overpowered. He had turned back at a moment when he should have strained every nerve to reach his destination. That was intolerable.

The memory of the hawk-nosed, steel-eyed officer who rode from Kurnaul to Meerut in twenty-four hours smote him like a whip. Would Hodson, the man who was prepared to cross the infernal regions if duty called—would *he* have quitted Cawnpore without making sure that Sir Hugh Wheeler was dead or a prisoner?

The answer to that unspoken question brought such a look of pain to Frank's face that Winifred, watching him from the carriage window, wondered what was wrong. She, too, had heard the policeman's statement, and was greatly relieved by it. Why should her lover be so perturbed, she wondered? Was it not good news that

the English in Cawnpore were at least endeavouring to hold Nana Sahib at bay?

It was on the tip of her tongue to ask what sudden cloud had fallen on him, when the carriage swung through a gateway, and she found herself inside the Residency. The breathless greetings exchanged between herself and many of her friends among the ladies of the garrison drove from her mind the misery she had seen in Frank's stern-set features. But the thought recurred later, and she spoke of it.

Now, Malcolm had already visited Sir Henry Lawrence, and told him the exact circumstances. The Chief Commissioner exonerated him from any blame, and, as a temporary matter, appointed him an extra A.D.C. on his staff. But the sore rankled, and it was destined, in due time, to affect the young officer's fortunes in the most unexpected way.

Above all else, he did not want Winifred to know that solicitude in her behalf had drawn him from the path of duty. So he fenced with her sympathetic inquiries, and she, womanlike, began to search for some shortcoming on her own part to account for her lover's gloom. Thus, not a rift, but an absence of full and complete understanding, existed between them, and each was conscious of it, though Malcolm alone knew its cause.

But that little cloud only darkened their own small world. Around them was the clash of arms, the din of preparation for the "fortnight's siege," which Lawrence thought the Residency might withstand if held resolutely! In truth, there never was a fortification, with the exception of that four-foot mud wall at Cawnpore, less calculated to repel the assault of a

determined foe than the ill-planned defences which provided the last English refuge in Oudh.

Winifred soon proved that she was of good metal. The alarms and excursions of the past three weeks were naturally trying to a girl born and bred in a quiet Devon village. But heredity, mostly blamed for the transmission of bad qualities, supplies good ones, too, whether in man or maid.

Descended on her father's side from a race of soldiers and diplomats, her mother was Yorkshire Trenholme, and it is said on Hamledown Moor that there were Trenholmes in Yorkshire before there was a king in England.

In spite of the terrific heat and the discomfort of her new surroundings, she made light of difficulties, found solace herself by cheering others, and quickly attained a prominent place in that small band of devoted women whose names will live until the story of Lucknow is forgotten.

She only met Frank occasionally, and by chance, their days being full of work and striving. A smile, a few tender words, perhaps only a hurried wave of the hand in passing, constituted their love idyll, for Lawrence fell ill, and his aides were kept busy, day and night, in passing to and fro between the bedside of the stricken leader and the many posts where his counsel was sought or the hasty provision of defence lagged for his orders.

The chief was so worn out with anxiety and sleepless labour that, on June 9th, he delegated his authority to a provisional council. Then the impetuous and chivalric Martin Gubbins, Financial Commissioner of Oudh, saw a means of obtaining by compromise that which he had

vainly urged on Lawrence—he persuaded the commanding officers of the native regiments in Lucknow to tell their men to go home on furlough until November.

This was actually done, but Lawrence was so indignant when he heard of it that he dissolved the council on June 12th, and sent Malcolm and other officers to recall the sepoys. Five hundred came back, vowing that they would stand by “Larrence-sahib Bahadur” till the last. They kept their word, and shared the danger and glory of the siege with the 32nd and the British Artillery.

Gubbins, a born firebrand, then pressed his superior to attack a rebel force that had gathered at the village of Chinhut, ten miles north-east of Lucknow. Unfortunately, Lawrence yielded, marched out with 700 men, half of whom were Europeans, and was badly defeated, owing to the desertion of some native gunners at a critical moment.

A disastrous rout followed. Colonel Case, of the 32nd, trying vainly with his men to stop the native runaways, was shot dead. For three miles the enemy's horse artillery pelted the hapless troops with grape, and the massacre of every man in the small column was only prevented by the bravery of a tiny squadron of volunteer cavalry, which held a bridge until the harassed infantry were able to cross.

Lawrence, when the day was lost, rode back to prepare the hapless Europeans in the Residency for the hazard that now threatened. The investment of the Residency could not be prevented. It was a question whether the mutineers would not surge over it in triumph within the hour.

From the windows of the lofty building which gave its

name to the cluster of houses within the walls, the despairing women saw their exhausted fellow-countrymen fighting a dogged rear-guard action against twenty times as many rebels. Some poor creatures, straining their eyes to find in the ranks of the survivors the husband they would never see again, clasped their children to their breasts and shrieked in agony. Others, like Lady Inglis, knelt and read the Litany. A few, and among them was Winifred, ran out with vessels full of water and tended the wants of the almost choking soldiers who were staggering to the shelter of the verandah.

She had seen Lawrence gallop to his quarters, and his drawn, haggard face told her the worst. He was accompanied by two staff officers, but Malcolm was not with him. The pandemonium that reigned everywhere for many minutes made it impossible that she should obtain any news of her lover's fate.

While the soldiers were flocking through the narrow streets that flanked or enfiladed the walls, the native servants and coolies engaged on the defences deserted *en masse*. The rebel artillery was beginning to batter the more exposed buildings; the British guns already in position took up the challenge; sepoys seized the adjoining houses and commenced a deadly musketry fire that was far more effective than the terrifying cannonade; and the men of the garrison who had not taken part in that fatal sortie rushed to their posts, determined to stem at all costs the imminent assault of the victorious mutineers.

An officer, seeing Winifred carrying water to some men who were lying in a position that would soon be swept by two guns mounted near a bridge across the Goomtee,

known as the Iron Bridge, ordered the soldiers to seek a safer refuge.

"And you, Miss Mayne, you must not remain here," he went on. "You will only lose your life, and we want brave women like you to live."

Winifred recognised him, though his face was blackened with powder and grime. Her own wild imaginings made death seem preferable to the anguish of her belief that Frank had fallen.

"Oh, Captain Fulton," she said, "can you tell me what has become of—of Mr Malcolm?"

"Yes," he said, summoning a gallant smile as an earnest of good news. "I heard the chief tell him to make the best of his way to Allahabad. That is the only quarter from which help can be expected, and to-day's disaster renders help imperative. Now, my dear child, don't take it to heart in that way. Malcolm will win through, never fear! He is just the man for such a task, and each mile he covers means—" he paused; a round shot crashed against a gable and brought down a chimney with a loud rattle of falling bricks—"means so many minutes less of this sort of thing."

But Winifred neither saw nor heard. Her eyes were blinded with tears, her brain dazed by the knowledge that her lover had undertaken alone a journey declared impossible from the more favourably situated station of Cawnpore many days earlier.

She managed, somehow, to find her uncle. Perhaps Fulton spared a moment to take her to him. She never knew. When next her ordered mind appreciated her environment, that last day of June, 1857, was drawing to its close, and the glare of rebel watch-fires, heightened

by the constant flashes of an unceasing bombardment, told her that the siege of Lucknow had begun.

Then she remembered that Mr Mayne had taken her to one of the cellars in the Residency in which the women and children were secure from the leaden hail that was beating on the walls. She had a vague notion that he carried a gun and a cartridge-belt, and a new panic seized her lest this Moloch of war had devoured her only relative, for her father had been killed at the battle of Alma, and her mother's death, three years later, had led to her sailing for India to take charge of her uncle's household.

The women near at hand were too sorrow-laden to give any real information. They only knew that every man within the Residency walls, even the one-armed, one-legged, decrepit pensioners who had lost limbs or health in the service of the Company, were mustered behind the frail defences.

To a girl of her temperament inaction was the least endurable of evils. Now that the shock of Malcolm's departure had passed, she longed to seek oblivion in work, while existence in that stifling underground atmosphere, with its dense crowd of heartbroken women and complaining children, was almost intolerable.

In defiance of orders—of which, however, she was then ignorant—she went to the ground floor. Passing out into the darkness, she crossed an open space to the hospital, and it chanced that the first person she encountered was Chumru, Malcolm's bearer.

The man's grim features changed their habitual scowl to a demoniac grin when he saw her.

"Ohé, miss-sahib," he cried, "this meeting is my

good fortune, for surely you can tell me where my sahib is ? ”

Winifred was not yet well versed in Hindustani, but she caught some of the words, and the contortions of Chumru's expressive countenance were familiar to her, as she had laughed, many a time, at Malcolm's recitals of his ill-favoured servant's undeserved repute as a villain of parts.

“Your sahib is gone to Allahabad,” she managed to say, before the thought came tardily that perhaps it was not wise to make known the Chief Commissioner's behests in this manner.

“To Illah-habad ! Shade of Mohammed, how can he go that far without me ? ” exclaimed Chumru. “Who will cook his food and brush his clothes ? Who will see to it that he is not robbed on the road by every thief that ever reared a chicken or milked a cow ? I feared that some evil thing had befallen him, but this is worse than aught that entered my head.”

All this was lost on Winifred. She imagined that the native was bewailing his master's certain death in striving to carry out a desperate mission, whereas he was really thinking that the most disturbing element about the sahib's journey was his own absence.

Seeing the distress in her face, Chumru was sure that she sympathised with his views.

“Never mind, miss-sahib,” said he, confidentially, “I will slip away now, steal a horse, and follow him.”

Without another word, he hastened out of the building, and left her wondering what he meant. She repeated the brief phrases, as well as she could recall them, to a Eurasian whom she found acting as a water-carrier.

This man translated Chumru's parting statement quite accurately, and, when Mr Mayne came at last from Bailey Guard, where he had been stationed until relieved after nightfall, he horrified her by telling her the truth—that it was a hundred chances to one against the unfortunate bearer's escape if he did really endeavour to break through the investing lines.

And, indeed, few men could have escaped from the entrenchment that night. Anyone who climbed to the third storey of the Residency—itsself the highest building within the walls, and standing on the most elevated site—would soon be dispossessed of the fantastic notion that any corner was left unguarded by the rebels. A few houses had been demolished by Lawrence's orders, it is true, but his deep respect for native ideals had left untouched the swarm of mosques and temples that stood between the Residency and the river.

"Spare the holy places!" he said, yet Mohammedan and Hindu did not scruple now to mask guns in the sacred enclosures and loophole the hallowed walls for musketry. On the city side, narrow lanes, lofty houses, and strongly-built palaces offered secure protection to the besiegers.

The British position was girt with the thousand gleams of a lightning more harmful than that devised by Nature, for each spurt of flame meant that fieldpiece or rifle was sending some messenger of death into the tiny area over which floated the flag of England. Within this outer circle of fire was a lesser one; the garrison made up for lack of numbers by a fixed resolve to hold each post until every man fell.

To modern ideas, the distance between these opposing

rings was absurdly small. As the siege progressed, besiegers and besieged actually came to know each other by sight. Even from the first, they were seldom separated by more than the width of an ordinary street, and conversation was always maintained, the threats of the mutineers being countered by the scornful defiance of the defenders.

Nevertheless, Chumru prevailed on Captain Weston to allow him to drop to the ground outside the Bailey Guard. The Police Superintendent, a commander who was now fighting his own corps, accepted the bearer's promise that if he were not killed or captured he would make the best of his way to Allahabad, and, even if he did not find his master, tell the British officer in charge there of the plight of Lucknow.

Chumru, who had no knowledge of warfare beyond his recent experiences, was acquainted with the golden rule that the less the time spent as an involuntary target the less chance is there of being hit. As soon as he reached the earth from the top of the wall he took to his heels and ran like a hare in the direction of some houses that stood near the Clock Tower.

He was fired at, of course, but missed, and the sepoy soon ceased their efforts to put a bullet through him, because they fancied he was a deserter.

As soon as they saw his face, they had no doubts whatever on that score. Indeed, were it his unhappy lot to fall in with the British patrols already beginning to feel their way north from Bengal along the Grand Trunk Road, he would assuredly have been hanged at sight on his mere appearance.

Chumru's answers to the questions showered on him

were magnificently untrue. According to him the Residency was already a ruin and its precincts a shambles. The accursed Feringhis might hold out till the morning, but he doubted it. Allah smite them!—that was why he chanced being shot by his brethren rather than be slain by mistake next day when the men of Oudh took vengeance on their oppressors. He could not get away earlier because he was a prisoner, locked up by the huzoors, forsooth, for a trifling matter of a few rupees left behind by one of the white dogs who fell that day at Chinhut.

In brief, Chumru abused the English with such an air that he was regarded by the rebels as quite an acquisition. They had not learned, as yet, that it was better to shoot a dozen belated friends than permit one spy to win his way through their lines.

Watching his opportunity, he slipped off into the bazaar. Now he was quite safe, being one among two hundred thousand. But time was passing. He wanted a horse, and might expect to find the canal bridge closely guarded.

Having a true Eastern sense of humour behind that saturnine visage of his, he hit on a plan of surmounting both difficulties with ease.

Singling out the first well-mounted and half-intoxicated native officer he met—though, to his credit be it said, he chose a Brahmin subadar of cavalry—he hailed him boldly.

“Brother,” said he, “I would have speech with thee.”

Now, Chumru took his life in his hands in this matter. For one wearing the livery of servitude to address a high-caste Brahmin thus, was incurring the risk of being

sabred then and there. In fact, the subadar was so amazed that he glared stupidly at the Mohammedan who greeted him as "brother," and it may be that those fierce eyes looking at him from different angles had a mesmeric effect.

"Thou?" he spluttered, reining in his horse, a hardy country-bred, good for fifty miles without bait.

"Even I," said Chumru. "I have occupation, but I want help. One will suffice, though there is gold enough for many."

"Gold, sayest thou?"

"Ay, gold in plenty. The dog of a Feringhi whom I served has had it hidden these two months in the thatch of his house near the Alumbagh. To-day he is safely bottled up there—" he jerked a thumb towards the sullen thunder of the bombardment. "I am a poor man, and I may be stopped if I try to leave the city. Take me up behind thee, brother, and give me safe passage to the bungalow, and behold, we will share treasure of a lakh or more!"

The Brahmin's brain was bemused with drink, but it took in two obvious elements of the tale at once. Here was a fortune to be gained by merely cutting a throat at the right moment.

"That is good talking," said he. "Mount, friend, and leave me to answer questions."

Chumru saw that he had gauged his man rightly, and the evil glint in the subadar's eyes told him the unspoken thought. He climbed up behind the high-peaked saddle, and, after the horse had showed his resentment of a double burthen, was taken through the bazaar as rapidly as its thronged streets permitted.

Sure enough, the canal bridge was watched.

"Whither go ye?" demanded the officer in charge.

"To bring in a Feringhi who is in hiding," said the Brahmin.

"Shall I send a few men with you?"

"Nay, we two are plenty—" this with a laugh.

"Quite plenty," put in Chumru. The officer glanced at him, and was convinced. Being a Mohammedan, he took Chumru's word without question, which showed the exceeding wisdom of Chumru in selecting a Brahmin for the sacrifice; thus was he prepared to deal with either party in an unholy alliance.

They jogged in silence past the Alumbagh. The Brahmin, on reflection, decided that he would stab Chumru before the hoard was disturbed, and he could then devise another hiding-place at his leisure. Chumru had long ago decided to send the Brahmin to the place where all unbelievers go, at the first suitable opportunity. Hence, the advantage lay with him, because he held a strategic position, and he could choose his own time.

Beyond the Alumbagh there were few houses, and these of mean description, and each moment the subadar's mind was growing clearer under the prospect of great wealth to be won so easily.

"Where is this bungalow, friend?" said he at last, seeing nothing but a straight road in front.

"Patience, brother. 'Tis now quite near. It lies behind that tope of trees yonder."

The other had turned to ascertain in which direction his guide was pointing.

"It is not on the main road, then?"

"No. A man who has gold worth the keeping loves not to dwell where all men pass."

A little further, and Chumru announced—

"We turn off here."

It was dark. He thought he had hit upon a byway, but no sooner did the horse quit the shadow of the trees by the roadside than he saw that he had been misled by the wheel-tracks of a ryot's cart. The Brahmin sniffed suspiciously.

"Is there no better way than this?" he cried, when his charger nearly stumbled into a deep ditch.

"One only, but you may deem it too far," was the quiet answer, and Chumru, placing his left hand on the Brahmin's mouth, plunged a long thin knife up the hilt between his ribs.

CHAPTER IX

A LONG CHASE

It was not Lawrence's order, but Malcolm's own suggestion, that led to the desperate task entrusted to the young aide by the chief. While those few heroic volunteer horsemen drove back the enemy's cavalry, and held the bridge over the Kokrail until the beaten army made good its retreat, Sir Henry halted by the roadside and watched the passing of his exhausted men. He had the aspect of one who hoped that some stray bullet would end the torment of life. In that grief-stricken hour his indomitable spirit seemed to falter. Ere night he was the Lawrence of old, but the magnitude of the calamity that had befallen him was crushing, and he winced beneath it.

Out of three hundred and fifty British soldiers in the column, he had lost one hundred and nineteen. Every gun served by natives was captured by the enemy. Worst of all, the moral effect of such a defeat outweighed a dozen victories. It not only brought about the instant beginning of the siege, but its proportions were grossly exaggerated in the public eye.

For the first time in many a year the white soldiers had fled before a strictly Indian force. They were outnumbered, which was nothing new in the history of the country, but it must be confessed they were outgeneralled, too.

Lawrence, never a believer in Gubbins's forward policy, showed unwonted hesitancy; even during the march to Chinhut he halted, advanced, and counter-marched the troops in a way that was foreign to a man of his decisive character. Where he was unaccountably timid, the enemy were unusually bold, and the outcome was disaster.

Yet, in this moment of bitterest adversity, he displayed that sympathy for the sufferings of others that won him the esteem of all who came in contact with him.

By some extraordinary blunder of the commissariat the 32nd had set forth that morning without breaking their fast. Now, after a weary march and a protracted fight in the burning sun, some of the men deliberately lay down to die.

"We can go no further," they said. "We may as well meet death here as a few yards away. And, when the sepoy overtakes us, we shall at least have breath enough left to die fighting."

Lawrence, when finally he turned his horse's head toward Lucknow, came upon such a group. He shook his feet free of the stirrups.

"Now, my lads," he said quietly, "you have no cause to despair. Catch hold of the leathers, two of you, and the horse will help you along. Mr Malcolm, you can help in the same way. Another mile will bring us to the city."

One of the men, finding it in his heart to pity his haggard-faced general, thought to console him by saying—

"We'll try, if it's only to please you, your honour,

but it's all up with us, I'm afraid. If the end doesn't come to-day it will surely be with us to-morrow."

"Why do you think that?" asked Lawrence. "We must hold the Residency until the last man falls. What else can we do?"

"I know that, your honour, but we haven't got the ghost of a chance. They're a hundred to one, and as well armed as we are. It 'ud be a different thing if help could come, but it can't. If what people are saying is true, sir, the nearest red-coats are at Allahabad, an' p'raps they're hard pressed, too."

"That is not the way to look at a difficulty. In war it is the unexpected that happens. Keep your spirits up, and you may live to tell your grandchildren how you fought the rebels at Lucknow. I want you and every man in the ranks to know that my motto is 'No Surrender.' You have heard what happened at Cawnpore. Here, in Lucknow, despite to-day's disaster, we shall fight to a finish."

An English battery came thundering down the road to take up a fresh position and assist in covering the retreat. The guns unlimbered near a well.

"There!" said Lawrence; "you see how my words have come true. A minute ago you were ready to fall before the first sowar who lifted his sabre over your head. Go now and help by drawing water for the gunners and yourselves. Then you can ride back on the carriages when they limber up."

Malcolm, to whom the soldier's words brought inspiration, spurred Nejdi alongside his chief.

"Will you permit me to ride to Allahabad, sir, and tell General Neill how matters stand here?" he said.

Lawrence looked at him as though the request were so fantastic that he had not fully grasped its meaning.

"To Allahabad?" he repeated, turning in the saddle to watch the effect of the first shot fired by the battery.

"Yes, sir," cried Malcolm, eagerly. "I know the odds are against me, but Hodson rode as far through the enemy's country only six weeks ago, and I did something of the kind, though not so successfully, when I went from Meerut to Agra and from Agra to Cawnpore."

"You had an escort, and I can spare not one man."

"I will go alone, sir."

"I would gladly avail myself of your offer, but the Residency will be invested in less than an hour."

"Let me go now, sir. I am well mounted. In the confusion I may be able to reach the open country without being noticed."

"Go, then, in God's name, and may your errand prosper, for you have many precious lives in your keeping."

Lawrence held out his hand, and Malcolm clasped it.

"Tell Neill," said the Chief Commissioner in a low tone of intense significance, "that we can hold out a fortnight, a month perhaps, or even a few days longer if buoyed up with hope. That is all. If you succeed, I shall not forget your services. The Viceroy has given me plenary powers, and I shall place your name in orders to-night, Captain Malcolm."

He kept his promise. When Lucknow was evacuated after the Second Relief, the official gazettes recorded that Lieutenant Frank Malcolm, of the 3rd Cavalry, had been promoted to a captaincy, supernumerary on the staff, for gallantry on the field on June 30th, while a

special minute provided that he should attain the rank of major if he reached Allahabad on or before July 4th.

From the point on the road to Chinhut where Malcolm bade his chief farewell, he could see the tower of the Residency, grey among the white domes and minarets that lined the south bank of the Goomtee. He had no illusions now as to the course the mutineers would follow. Native rumour had brought the news of the massacre at Cawnpore, though the ghastly tragedy of the well was yet to come.

He knew that this elegant city, resplendent and glorious in the sheen of the setting sun, would soon be a living hell. A fearsome struggle would surge around that tower where the British flag was flying. A few hundreds of Europeans would strive to keep at bay tens of thousands of eager rebels. Would they succeed? Pray Heaven for that, while Winifred lived.

And, in all human probability, their fate rested with him. If he were able to stir the British authorities in the South to almost superhuman efforts, a relieving force might arrive before the end of July. It was a great undertaking he had set himself. Yet, he would have attempted it for Winifred's sake alone, and the thought of her anguish when she heard that he was gone gave him a pang that was not solaced by the dearest honour a soldier can attain—promotion on the field.

It was out of the question that he should return to the Residency before he began his self-imposed mission. Already the enemy's cavalry were swooping along both flanks of the routed troops. In a few minutes the only available road, which crossed the Goomtee by a bridge of boats, and led through the suburbs by way of the

Dilkusha, would be closed. As it was, he had to press Nejdi into a fast gallop before he could clear the left wing of the advancing army. Then, easing the pace a little, he swung off into a byway, and, ere long, was cantering down the quiet road that led to Rai Bareilly and thence to Allahabad.

At seven o'clock he was ten miles from Lucknow ; at eight, nearly twenty. The quick-falling shadows warned him that if he would procure food for Nejdi and himself he must seize the next opportunity that presented itself, whilst a rest of some sort was absolutely necessary if he meant to spare his gallant arab for the trial of endurance that still lay ahead.

Though he had never before travelled that road he was acquainted with its main features. Thirty miles from his present position was the small town of Rai Bareilly. Fifty miles to the south-east was Partabgarh. Fifty miles due south of Partabgarh lay Allahabad.

The scheme roughly outlined in his mind was, in the first place, to buy, borrow, or steal a native pony which would carry him to the outskirts of Rai Bareilly before dawn. Then, remounting Nejdi, he would either ride rapidly through the town, or make a *détour*, whichever method seemed preferable after inquiry from such peaceful natives as he met on the road. Four hours beyond Rai Bareilly he would leave the main road, strike full south for the Ganges, and follow the left bank of the river until he was opposite Allahabad. He refused to ask himself what he would do if Allahabad were in the hands of the rebels.

"I shall tackle that difficulty about this hour to-morrow," he communed, with a laugh at his own expense.

“Just now, when a hundred miles of unknown territory face me, I have enough to contend with. So, steady is the word, good horse !”

Thus far, the wayfarers encountered during his journey had treated him civilly. The ryots, peasant proprietors of the soil, drew their rough carts aside and salaamed as he passed. These men knew little or nothing as yet of the great events that were taking place on the south and west of the Ganges. A few educated bunniahs and zamindars,¹ who doubtless had heard of wild doings in the cities, glanced at him curiously, and would have asked him for news if he had not invariably ridden by at a rapid pace.

As it happened, the route he followed was far removed from the track of murder and rapine that marked the early progress of the Mutiny, and the mere sight of a British officer, moving on with such speed and confidence, must have set these worthy folk a-wondering. Between Rai Bareilly and the Grand Trunk Road stood the wide barrier of the sacred river, while the town itself must not be confused with Bareilly—situated nearly a hundred miles north of Lucknow—which became notorious as the headquarters of Khan Bahadur Khan, a pensioner of the British Government, and a ruffian second only to Nana Sahib in merciless cruelty.

All unknown to Malcolm, and, indeed, little recognised as yet in India, save by a few district officials, there was a man in Rai Bareilly that night who was destined to test the chivalry of Britain on many a hard-fought field. Ahmed Ullah, famous in history as the Moulvie of Fyzabad, had crossed the young officer's path once

¹ Bunniah, grain dealer, zamindar, landowner.

already. When Malcolm took his untrained charger for the first wild gallop out of Meerut—the ride that ended ignominiously in the moat of the King of Delhi's hunting-lodge—he nearly rode over a Mohammedan priest as he tore along the Grand Trunk Road some five miles south of the station.

It would have been well for India if Nejdi's hoofs had then and there struck the breath out of that ascetic frame. Of all the firebrands raised by the Mutiny, the Moulvie of Fyzabad was the fiercest and most dangerous. Early in the year he was imprisoned for preaching sedition. Unhappily, he was liberated too soon, and, his fanaticism only inflamed the more by punishment, he went to the Punjab, and sowed disaffection far and wide by his burning zeal for the spread of Islam.

By chance he returned to Fyzabad before the outbreak at Meerut. The feeble loyalty of the native regiments at Lucknow sufficed to keep all the borderland of Nepaul quiet for nearly two months. But the reports brought by his disciples warned the Moulvie that the true believer's day of triumph was approaching. Moreover, the Begum of Oudh, one of three women who were worth as many army corps to the mutineers, was waiting for him at Rai Bareilly, a placid eddy in the backwash of the torrent sweeping through Upper India, and Ahmed Ullah had left Fyzabad on the evening of the 29th to keep his tryst.

It was, therefore, a lively brood of scorpions that Malcolm proposed to disturb when he dismounted from a wretched tat he had purchased at his first halt, and fed and watered Nejdi again, just as a glimmer of dawn appeared in the east.

According to his calculations, he was about a mile from Rai Bareilly. The hour was the quietest and coolest of the hot Indian night. Some pattering drops of rain, and the appearance of heavy clouds in the south-west, gave premonitions of a fresh outburst of the monsoon. He was glad of it. Rain would freshen his horse and himself. It made the ground soft, and would retard his speed once he quitted the high road, but these drawbacks were more than balanced by the absence of the terrific heat of the previous day.

He unstrapped his cloak and flung it loosely over his shoulders. Then he waited, until the growing light brought forth the untiring tillers of the fields, and he was able to glean some sort of information as to the position of affairs in the town.

If the place were occupied by a prowling gang of rebels he might secure a guide by payment, and avoid its narrow streets altogether. At any rate, it would be a foolish thing to dash through blindly and trust to luck. The issues at stake were too important for that sort of imprudent valour. His object was to reach Allahabad that night—not to hew his way through opposing hordes and risk being cut down in the process.

The lowing of cattle, and the soft stumbling tread of many unshod feet, told him that someone was approaching. A herd of buffaloes loomed out of the half-light. Their driver, an old man, was quite willing to talk.

“There are no sahib-log in the town,” he said, for Malcolm deemed it advisable to begin by a question on that score. “The collector-sahib had a camp here three weeks ago, but he went away, and that was a misfortune,

because the budmashes from Fyzabad came, and honest people were sore pressed."

"From Fyzabad, sayest thou? They must be cleared out. Where are they?"

"You are too late, huzoor. They went to Cawnpore, I have heard. Men talk of much dacoity in that district. Is that true, sahib?"

"Yes, but fear not; it will be suppressed. I am going to Allahabad. Is this the best road?"

"I have never been so far, sahib, but it lies that way."

"Is the bazaar quiet now?"

"I have seen none save our own people these two days, yet it was said in the bazaar last night that a Begum tarried at the rest-house."

"A Begum! What Begum?"

"I know not her name, huzoor, but she is one of the daughters of the King of Oudh."

Malcolm was relieved to hear this. The wild notion had seized him that the Princess Roshinara, a stormy petrel of political affairs just then, might have drifted to Rai Bareilly by some evil chance.

"You see this pony?" he said. "Take him. He is yours. I have no further use for him. Are you sure that there are none to dispute my passage through the town?"

The old peasant was so taken aback by the gift that he could scarce speak intelligibly, but he assured the Presence that, at such an hour, none would interfere with him.

Malcolm decided to risk it. He mounted, and rode forward at a sharp trot. Of course, he had not been able to adopt any kind of disguise. While doing duty at the

Residency he had thrown aside the turban reft from Abdul Huq, and he now wore the peaked shako, with white pugaree, affected by junior staff officers at that period. His long military cloak, steel scabbard, sabretache, and Wellington boots, proclaimed his profession, while his blue riding-coat and cross-belts were visible in front, as he meant to have his arms free in case the necessity arose to use sword or pistol.

And he rode thus into Rai Bareilly, watchful, determined, ready for any emergency. So boldly did he advance that he darted past half a dozen men whose special duty it was to stop and question all travellers. They were stationed on the flat roofs of two houses, one on each side of the way, and a rope was stretched across the road in readiness to drop and hinder the progress of anyone who did not halt when summoned. It was a simple device. It had not been seen by the man who drove the buffaloes, and, by reason of Malcolm's choice of the turf by the side of the road as the best place for Nejdi, it chanced to dangle high enough to permit their passing beneath.

The sentries, though caught napping, tried to make amends for their carelessness. In the growing light one of them saw Malcolm's accoutrements, and he yelled loudly—

“Ohé, bhai, look out for the Feringhi !”

Frank, unfortunately, had not noticed the rope. But he heard the cry, and understood that the “brother” to whom it was addressed would probably be discovered at the end of the short street. He shook Nejdi into a canter, drew his sword, and looked keenly ahead for the first sign of those who would bar his path.

Dawn was peeping greyly over the horizon, and Ahmed Ullah, Moulvie and interpreter of the Koran, standing in an open courtyard, was engaged in the third of the day's prayers, of which the first was intoned after sunset the previous evening. He was going through the Rêka with military precision, and, as luck would have it, the Kibleh, or direction of Mecca, brought his fierce gaze to the road along which Malcolm was galloping.

Never did priest become warrior more speedily than Ahmed Ullah when that warning shout rang out and he discovered that a British officer was riding at top speed through the quiet bazaar. Assuming that this unexpected apparition betokened the arrival of a punitive detachment, he uttered a loud cry, leaped to the gates of the courtyard, and closed them.

Malcolm, of course, saw him, and regarded his action as that of a frightened man, who would be only too glad when he could resume his devotions in peace. Ahmed Ullah, soon to become a claimant of sovereign power as "King of Hindustan," was not a likely person to let a prize slip through his fingers thus easily.

Keeping up an ululating clamour of commands, he ran to the roof of the dwelling, snatched up a musket, and took steady aim. By this time, Malcolm was beyond the gate and thought himself safe. Then he saw a rope drawn breast-high across the narrow street, and gesticulating natives, variously armed, leaning over the parapets on either hand. He had to decide in the twinkling of an eye whether to go on or turn back. Probably his retreat would be cut off by some similar device, so the bolder expedient of an advance offered the better chance.

An incomparable horseman, mounted on an absolutely trustworthy horse, he lay well forward on Nejdi's neck, resolving to try and pick up the slack of the rope on his sword and lift it out of the way. To endeavour to cut through such an obstacle would undoubtedly have brought about a disaster. It would yield, and the keenest blade might fail to sever it completely, while any slackening of pace would enable the hostile guard to shoot him at point-blank range.

These considerations passed through his mind while Nejdi was covering some fifty yards. To disconcert the enemy, who were not sepoys, and whose guns were mostly antiquated weapons of the matchlock type, he pulled out a revolver and fired twice. Then he leaned forward, with right arm thrown well in front, and the point of his sword three feet beyond Nejdi's head. At that instant, when Frank was unconsciously offering a bad target, the Moulvie fired. The bullet ploughed through the Englishman's right fore-arm, struck the hilt of the sword, and knocked the weapon out of his hand.

Exactly what happened next, he never knew. From the nature of his own bruises afterwards, and the manner in which he was jerked backwards from the saddle, he believed that the rope missed Nejdi altogether, but caught him by the left shoulder. The height of a horse extended at the gallop is surprisingly low as compared with the height of the same animal standing or walking. There was even a remote possibility that the rope would strike the arab's forehead and bound clear of his rider.

But that was not to be. Here was Frank, hurled to the roadway, and striving madly to resist the treble

shock of his wound, of the blow dealt by the rope, and of the fall, while Nejdi was tearing away through Rai Bareilly as though all the djinns of his native desert were pursuing him.

Though Malcolm's torn arm was bleeding copiously, and he was stunned by being thrown so violently flat on his back, no bones were broken. His rage at the trick fate had played him, the overwhelming bitterness of another and most lamentable failure, enabled him to struggle to his feet and empty at his assailants the remaining chambers of the revolver which was still tightly clutched in his left hand. He missed, luckily, or they would have butchered him forthwith. In another minute he was standing before Moulvie Ahmed Ullah, and that earnest advocate of militant Islam was plying him with mocking questions.

"Whither so fast, Feringhi? Dost thou run from death, or ride to seek it? Mayhap, thou comest from Lucknow? If so, what news? And where are the papers thou art carrying?"

Frank's strength was failing him. To the weakness resulting from loss of blood was added the knowledge that this time he was trapped without hope of escape. The magnificent display of self-command entailed by the effort to rise and face his foes in a last defiance could not endure much longer. He knew it was near the end when he had difficulty in finding the necessary words in Urdu. But he spoke, slowly and firmly, compelling his unwilling brain to form the sentences.

"I have no papers, and if I had, who are you that demand them?" he said. "I am an officer of the Company, and I call on all honest and loyal men to help

me in my duty. I promise—to those who assist me to reach Allahabad—that they will be—pardoned for any past offences—and well rewarded—”

The room swam around him, and the grim-visaged moullah became a grotesque being, with dragon's eyes and a turban like a cloud. Yet he kept on hoping against imminent death itself that his words would reach some willing ear.

“Any man—who tells General Neill-sahib—at Allahabad—that help is wanted—at Lucknow—will be made rich—Help—at—Lucknow—immediately. I, Malcolm-sahib—of the 3rd Cavalry—say—”

He collapsed in the grasp of the men who were holding him.

“Thou hast said enough, dog of a Nazarene. Take him without and hang him,” growled Ahmed Ullah.

“Nay,” cried a woman's voice from behind a straw portière that closed the arched verandah of the house. “Thou art too ready with thy sentences, Moulvie. Rather let us bind his wounds and give him food and drink. Then he will recover and tell us what we want to know.”

“He hath told us already, Princess,” said the other, his harsh accents sounding more like the snarl of a wolf than a human voice. “He comes from Lucknow, and he seeks succour from Allahabad. That means—”

“It means that he can be hanged as easily at eventide as at daybreak, and we shall surely learn the truth, as such men do not breathe lies.”

“He will not speak, Princess.”

“Leave that to me. If I fail, I hand him over to thee, forthwith. Let him be brought within and

tended, and let someone ride after his horse, as there may be letters in the wallets. I have spoken, Ahmed Ullah. See that I am obeyed."

The Moulvie said no word. He went back to his praying-mat, and bent again toward the west, where the Holy Kaaba enshrines the ruby sent down from heaven. But, though his lips muttered the rubric of the Koran, his heart whispered other things, and chief among them was the vow that ere many days be passed he would so contrive affairs that no woman's whim should thwart his judgment.

So the clouded day broke sullenly, with gusts of warm rain and red gleams of a sun striving to disperse the mists. And the earth soaked and steamed and threw off fever-laden vapours as she nursed the grain to life and bade the arid plain clothe itself in summer greenery. It was a bad day to lie wounded, and ill, and a prisoner, and, despite the cooling showers, it was a hot day to ride far and fast.

Hence, it was long past noon when a servant announced to the Begum that the sahib—for thus the man described Malcolm until sharply admonished to learn the new order of speech—the Nazarene, then, was somewhat recovered from his faintness. And, about the same hour, when a subadar of the 7th Cavalry clattered into Rai Bareilly, and was told that a certain Feringhi whom he sought was safely laid by the heels there, so sultry was the atmosphere that he seemed to be quite glad of the news.

"Shabash!" he cried, as he dismounted. "May I never drink at the White Pond of the Prophet if that be not good hearing! So you have caught him, brethren!

Wao, wao! you have done a great thing. He is not killed?—No? That is well, for he is sorely wanted at Lucknow. Tie him tightly, though. He is a fox in guile, and might give me the slip again. May his bones bleach in an infidel's grave!—I have hunted him fifty miles, yet scarce a man I met had seen him!”

CHAPTER X

WHEREIN FATE PLAYS TRICKS WITH MALCOLM

IF it is difficult for the present generation to understand the manners and ways of its immediate forebears, how much more difficult to ask it to appreciate the extraordinary features of the siege of Lucknow!

Let the reader who knows London imagine some parish in the heart of the City barricading itself behind a mud wall against its neighbours: let him garrison this flimsy fortress with sixteen hundred and ninety-two combatants, of whom a large number were men of an inferior race and of doubtful loyalty to those for whom they fought, while scores of the Europeans were infirm pensioners: let him cram the rest of the available shelter with women and children: let him picture the network of narrow streets, tall houses, and a few open spaces—often separated from the enemy only by the width of a lane—as being subjected to interminable bombardment at point-blank range; and he will have a clear notion of some at least of the conditions which obtained in Lucknow when that gloomy July 1st carried on the murderous work begun on the previous evening.

The Residency itself was the only strong building in an enclosure seven hundred yards long and four hundred yards wide, though by no means so large in area as these figures suggest. The whole position was sur-

rounded by an adobe wall and ditch, strengthened at intervals by a gate or a stouter embrasure for a gun.

The other structures, such as the banqueting-hall, which was converted into a hospital, the Treasury, the brigade mess, the Begum Kotee, the barracks, and a few nondescript houses and offices, were utterly unsuited for defence against musketry alone. As to their capacity to resist artillery fire, that was a grim jest with the inmates, who dreaded the falling masonry as much as the rebel shells.

Even the Residency was forced to use its underground rooms for the protection of the greater part of the women and children, while the remaining buildings, except the Begum Kotee, which was comparatively sheltered on all sides, were so exposed to the enemy's guns that when some sort of clearance was made in October, four hundred and thirty-five cannon balls were taken out of the brigade mess.

Before the siege commenced the British also occupied a strong palace called the Muchee Bhowun, standing outside the entrenchment and commanding the stone bridge across the river Goomtee. A few hours' experience revealed the deadly peril to which its small garrison was exposed, and Lawrence decided at all costs to abandon it. A rude semaphore was erected on the roof of the Residency, and on the first morning of the siege three officers signalled to the commandant of the outlying fort, Colonel Palmer, that he was to spike his guns, blow up the building, and bring his men into the main position.

The three did their signalling under a heavy fire, but they were understood. Happily the prospect of loot in

the city drew off thousands of the rebels after sunset, and Colonel Palmer marched out quietly at midnight. A few minutes later an appalling explosion shook every house in Lucknow. The Muchee Bhowun, with its immense stores, had been blown to the sky.

That same day Lawrence received what the Celtic soldiers among the garrison regarded as a warning of his approaching end. He was working in his room with his secretary, when a shell crashed through the wall and burst at the feet of the two men. Neither was injured, but Captain Wilson, one of his staff-officers, begged the chief to remove his office to a less exposed place.

"Nothing of the kind," said Sir Henry, cheerfully. "The sepoys don't possess an artilleryman good enough to throw a second shell into the same spot."

"It will please all of us if you give in on this point, sir," persisted Wilson.

"Oh, well, if you put it that way, I will turn out to-morrow," was the smiling answer.

Next morning at eight o'clock, after a round of inspection, the general, worn out by anxiety and want of sleep, threw himself on a bed in a corner of the room.

Wilson came in.

"Don't forget your promise, sir," he said.

"I have not forgotten, but I am too tired to move now. Give me another hour or two."

Lawrence went on to explain some orders to his aide. While they were talking another shell entered the small apartment, exploded, and filled the air with dust and stifling fumes. Wilson's ears were stunned by the noise, but he cried out twice—

"Sir Henry, are you hurt?"

Lawrence murmured something, and Wilson rushed to his side. The coverlet of the bed was crimson with blood. Some men of the 32nd ran in, and carried their beloved leader to another room. Then a surgeon came and pronounced the wound to be mortal. On the morning of the 4th Lawrence died. He was conscious to the last, and passed his final hours planning and contriving and making arrangements for the continuance of the defence.

"Never surrender!" was his dying injunction. Shot and shell battered unceasingly against the walls of Dr Fayrer's house, in which he lay dying, but their terrors never shook that stout heart, and he died as he lived, a splendid example of an officer and a gentleman, a type of all that is best and noblest in the British character.

And death, who did not spare the chief, sought lowlier victims. During the first week of the siege the average number killed daily was twenty. Even when the troops learnt to avoid the exposed places, and began to practise the little tricks and artifices that tempt an enemy to reveal his whereabouts to his own undoing, the daily death-roll was ten for more than a month.

There was no real safety anywhere. Even in the Begum Kotee, where Winifred and the other ladies of the garrison were lodged, some of them were hit. Twice ere the end of July Winifred awoke in the morning to find bullets on the floor and the mortar of the wall broken within a few inches of her head. That she slept soundly under such conditions is a remarkable tribute to human nature's knack of adapting itself to circumstances. After a few days of excessive nervous-

ness, the most timorous among the women were heard to complain of the monotony of existence !

And two amazing facts stand out from the record of guard-mounting, cartridge-making, cooking, cleaning, and the rest of the everyday doings inseparable from life even in a siege. Although the rebels now numbered at least twenty thousand men, including six thousand trained soldiers, they were long in hardening their hearts to attempt that escalade which if undertaken on the last day of June could scarcely have failed to be successful. They were not cowards. They gave proof in plenty of their courage and fighting stamina. Yet they cringed before men whom they had learnt to regard as the dominant race.

The other equally surprising element in the situation was the readiness of the garrison, doomed by all the laws of war to early extinction, to extract humour out of its forlorn predicament.

The most dangerous post in the entrenchment was the Cawnpore Battery. It was commanded by a building known as Johannes' House, whence an African negro, christened "Bob the Nailer" by the wits of the 32nd, picked off dozens of the defenders during the opening days of the siege.

What quarrel this stranger in a strange land had with the English no one knows, but the defenders were well aware of his identity, and annoyed him by exhibiting a most unflattering effigy. Needless to say, the whites of his eyes and his woolly hair were reproduced with marked effect, and "Bob the Nailer" gave added testimony of his skill with a rifle by shooting out both eyes in the dummy figure.

Winifred had heard of this man. Once she actually saw him while she was peeping through a forbidden casement. Knowing the wholesale destruction of her fellow-countrymen with which he was credited, she had it in her heart to wish that she held a gun at that moment, and she would surely have done her best to kill him.

He disappeared, and she turned away with a sigh, to meet her uncle hastening towards her.

"Ah, Winifred," he cried, "what were you doing there? Looking out, I am certain. Have you forgotten the punishment inflicted on Lot's wife when she would not obey orders?"

"I have just had a glimpse of that dreadful negro in Johannes' House," she said.

Mr Mayne threw down a bundle of clothes he was carrying. He unslung his rifle. His face, tanned by exposure to sun and rain, lost some of its brick-red colour.

"Are you sure?" he whispered, as if their voices might betray them. Like every other man in the garrison, he longed to check the career of "Bob the Nailer."

"It is too late," said the girl. "He was visible only for an instant. Look, I saw him at that window."

She partly opened the wooden shutter again, and pointed to an upper storey of the opposite building. Almost instantly a bullet imbedded itself in the solid planks. Some watcher had noted the opportunity and taken it. Winifred coolly closed the casement and adjusted its cross-bar.

"Perhaps it is just as well you missed the chance,"

she said. "You might have been shot yourself while you were taking aim."

"And what about you, my lady?"

"I shan't offend again, uncle dear. I really could not tell you why I looked out just now. Things were quiet, I suppose. And I forgot that the opening of a window would attract attention. But why in the world are you bringing me portions of Mr Malcolm's uniform? That is what you have in the bundle, is it not?"

"Yes. The three men who shared his room are dead, and the place is wanted as an extra ward. I happened to hear of it, so I have rescued his belongings."

"Do you—do you think he will ever claim them, or that we shall live to safeguard them?"

"My dear one, that is as Providence directs. It is something to be thankful for that we are alive and uninjured. And that reminds me. They need a lot of bandages in the hospital. Will you tear Malcolm's linen into strips? I will come for them after the last post."¹

He hurried away, leaving the odd collection of garments with her. The clothes were her lover's parade uniform, which Malcolm had carried from Meerut in a valise strapped behind the saddle. The other articles were purchased in Lucknow, and had never been worn. In comparison with the smart full-dress kit of a cavalry officer and the spotless linen, a soiled and mud-spattered turban looked singularly out of place. It was as though

¹ Non-military readers may need to be reminded that the "last post" is a bugle-call which signifies the close of the day. It is usually succeeded by "lights out."

some tatterdemalion had thrust himself into a gathering of dandies.

Being a woman, Winifred gave no heed to the fact that the metal badge on the crossed folds was not that worn by an officer, nor did she observe that it carried the crest of the 2nd Cavalry, whereas Malcolm's regiment was the 3rd. But being also a very thrifty and industrious little person, she decided to untie the turban, wash it, and use its many yards of fine muslin for the manufacture of lint.

The folds of a turban are usually kept in position by pins, but when she came to examine this one she discovered that it was tied with whipcord. Her knowledge of native headgear was not extensive, so this measure of extra security did not surprise her. A pair of scissors soon overcame the difficulty; she shook out the neat folds, and a pearl necklace and a piece of paper fell to the floor.

She was alone in her room at the moment. No one heard her cry of surprise, almost of terror. One glance at the glistening pearls told her that they were of exceeding value. They ranged from the size of a small pea to that of a large marble; their white sheen and velvet purity bespoke rareness and skilled selection. The setting alone would vouch for their quality. Each pearl was secured to its neighbour by clasps and links of gold, while a brooch-like fastening in front was studded with fine diamonds. Winifred sank to her knees. She picked up this remarkable ornament as gingerly as if she were handling a dead snake.

In the vivid light the pearls shimmered with wonderful and ever-changing tints. They seemed to whisper of

love, and hate—of all the passions that stir heart and brain into frenzy—and through a mist of fear and awed questioning came a doubt, a suspicion, a searching of her soul as she recalled certain things which the thrilling events of her recent life had dulled almost to extinction.

Her uncle had told her of the Princess Roshinara's words to Malcolm on that memorable night of May 10th when he rode out from Meerut to help them. At the time, perhaps, a little pang of jealousy made its presence felt, for no woman can bear to hear of another woman's overtures to her lover. The meeting at Bithoor helped to dispel that half-formed illusion, and she had not troubled since to ask herself why the Princess Roshinara was so ready to help Malcolm to escape. She never dreamed that she herself was a pawn in the game that was intended to bring Nana Sahib to Delhi. But now, with this royal trinket glittering in her hands, she could hardly fail to connect it with the only Indian Princess of whom she had any knowledge, and the torturing fact was seemingly undeniable that Malcolm had this priceless necklace in his possession without telling her of its existence.

Certainly he had chosen a singular hiding-place, and never did man treat such a treasure with such apparent carelessness. But—there it was. The studied simplicity of its concealment had been effective. She had heard, long since, how he parted from Lawrence on the Chinhut road. Since that hour there was no possible means of communicating with Lucknow, even though he had reached Allahabad safely.

And he had never told her a word about it. It was

that that rankled. Poor Winifred rose from her knees in a mood perilously akin to her hatred of the negro who dealt death or disablement to her friends of the garrison, but this time it was a woman, not a man, whom she regarded as the enemy.

Then, in a bitter temper, she stooped again to rescue the bit of discoloured paper that had fallen with the pearls. Her anger was not lessened by finding that it was covered with Hindustani characters. They, of course, offered her no clue to the solution of the mystery that was wringing her heart-strings. If anything, the illegible scrawl only added to her distress. The document was something unknown; therefore it lent itself to distrust.

At any rate, the turban was destined not to be shredded into lint that day. She busied herself with tearing up the rest of the linen. When night came and Mr Mayne could leave his post, she showed him the paper and asked him to translate it.

He was a good Eastern scholar, but the dull rays of a small oil lamp were not helpful in a task always difficult to English eyes. He bent his brows over the script, and began to decipher some of the words.

“ ‘Malcolm-sahib . . . the Company’s 3rd Regiment of Horse . . . heaven-born Princess Roshinara Begum . . . ’ Where in the world did you get this, Winifred, and how did it come into your possession ? ” he said.

“ It was in Mr Malcolm’s turban—the one you brought me to-day from his quarters.”

“ In his turban ? Do you mean that it was hidden there ? ”

"Yes, something of the kind."

Mayne examined the paper again.

"That is odd," he muttered, after a pause.

"But what does the writing mean? You say it mentions his name and that of the Princess Roshinara? Surely it has some definite significance?"

The Commissioner was so taken up with the effort to give each spidery curve and series of distinguishing dots and vowel marks their proper bearing in the text that he did not catch the note of disdain in his niece's voice.

"I have it now," he said, peering at the document while he held it close to the lamp. "It is a sort of pass. It declares that Mr Malcolm is a friend of the Begum, and gives him safe-conduct if he visits Delhi within three days of the date named here, but I cannot tell when that would be until I consult a native calendar. It is signed by Bahadur Shah, and is altogether a somewhat curious thing to be in Malcolm's possession. Is that all you know of it—merely that it was stuck in a fold of his turban?"

"This accompanied it," said Winifred, with a restraint that might have warned her hearer of the passion it strove to conceal. But Mayne was deaf to Winifred's coldness. If he was startled before, he was positively amazed when she produced the necklace.

He took it, appraised its value silently, and scrutinised the workmanship in the gold links.

"Made in Delhi," he half whispered. "A wonderful thing, probably worth two lakhs of rupees,¹ or even more. It is old, too. The craftsman who fashioned

¹ At that time, about £20,000.

this clasp is not to be found nowadays. Why, it may have been worn by Nurmahal herself! Each of its fifty pearls could supply a chapter of a romance. And you found it, together with this safe-conduct, in Malcolm's turban?"

"Yes, uncle. Do you think I would speak carelessly of such a precious object? When one has discovered a treasure, it is a trait of human nature to note pretty closely the place where it came to light."

Mayne was yet too much taken up with puzzling side issues to pay heed to Winifred's demeanour. He remembered the extraordinary proposal made by Roshinara to Malcolm ere she drove away to Delhi from her father's hunting-lodge. Could it be possible that his young friend had met the princess on other occasions than that which Malcolm laughingly described as the lunging of Nejdi and the plunging of his master?

It occurred to him now, with a certain chilling misgiving, that he had himself broken in with a bewildered exclamation when Frank seemed to regard the princess's offer of employment in her service as worthy of serious thought. There were other aspects of the affair—aspects so sinister that he almost refused to harbour them. Rather to gain time than with any definite motive, he stooped over the pass again, meaning to read it word for word.

"Of course, you have not forgotten, uncle, that Mr Malcolm took us into his confidence so far as to tell us of the curious letter that reached him after the second battle outside Delhi?" said Winifred. "It saved him at Bithoor when the men from Cawnpore meant to hang him, and, seeing that he had the one article in his

possession, it is passing strange that he should have omitted to mention the other—to me.”

Then the man knew what it all meant to the girl. He placed his arm around her neck and drew her towards him.

“My poor Winifred,” he murmured, “you might at least have been spared such a revelation at this moment !”

His sympathy broke down her pride. She sobbed as though her heart would yield beneath the strain. For a little while there was no sound in the room but Winifred’s plaints, while ever and anon the walls shook with the crash of the “cannonade and the bursting of shells.

Ahmed Ullah, Moulvie of Fyzabad, had a quick ear for the arrival of the native officer of cavalry from Lucknow.

“Peace be with thee, brother !” said he, after a shrewd glance at the travel-worn and bloodstained man and horse. “Thou hast ridden far and fast. What news hast thou of the Jihad,¹ and how fares it at Lucknow ?”

“With thee be peace !” was the reply. “We fought the Nazarenes yesterday at a place called Chinhut, and sent hundreds of the infidel dogs to the fifth circle of Jehannum. The few who escaped our swords are penned up in the Residency, and its walls are now crumbling before our guns. By the tomb of Nizam-ud-din the unbelievers must have fallen ere the present hour.”

The Moulvie’s wicked eyes sparkled.

“Praise be to Allah and his Prophet for ever !” he cried. “How came this thing to pass ?”

¹ Religious war.

"My regiment took the lead," said the rissaldar, proudly. "We had long chafed under the commands of the huzoors. At last we rose and made short work of our officers. You see here"—and he touched a rent in his right side—"where one of them tried to stop the thrust that ended him. But I clave him to the chin, the swine-eater, and when Larrence-sahib attacked us at Chinhut we chased him over the canal and through the streets."

"Wao, wao! This is good hearing! Wast thou sent by some of the faithful to summon me, brother?"

"To summon thee and all true believers to the green standard. Yet had I one other object in riding to Rai Bareilly. A certain Nazarene, Malcolm by name, an officer of the 3rd Cavalry, was bidden by Larrence-sahib to make for Allahabad and seek help. The story runs that the Nazarenes are mustering there for a last stand ere we drive them into the sea. This Malcolm-sahib—"

"Enough!" said the Moulvie, fiercely, for his self-love was wounded at learning that the rebel messenger classed him with the mob. "We have him here. He is in safe keeping when he is in the hands of Ahmed Ullah!"

"What!" exclaimed the new-comer, with a mighty oath. "Are you the saintly Moulvie of Fyzabad?"

"Whom else, then, did you expect to find?"

"You, indeed, O revered one. But not here. My orders were, once I had secured the Nazarene, to send urgently to Fyzabad and bid you hurry to Lucknow with all speed."

"Ha! Say'st thou, friend? Who gave thee this message?"

"One whom thou wilt surely listen to. Yet these

things are not for every man to hear. We must speak of them apart."

The Moulvie was appeased. Nay, more, his ambition was fired.

"Come with me into the house. You are in need of food and rest. Come! We can talk while you eat."

He drew nearer, but a woman's voice was raised from behind a screen in one of the rooms.

"Tarry yet a minute, friend. I would learn more of events in Lucknow. Tell us more fully what has taken place there."

"The Begum of Oudh must be obeyed," said Ahmed Ullah, with a warning glance at the other. He was met with a villainous and intriguing look that would have satisfied Machiavelli, but the officer bowed low before the screen.

"I am indeed honoured to be the bearer of good tidings to royal ears," said he. "Doubtless I should have been entrusted with letters for your Highness were not the city in some confusion owing to the fighting."

"Who commands our troops?" came the sharp demand.

"At present, your Highness, the Nawab of Rampur represents the King of Oudh."

"The Nawab of Rampur! That cannot be tolerated. Ahmed Ullah!"

"I am here," growled the Moulvie, smiling sourly.

"We must depart within the hour. Let my litter be prepared, and send men on horseback to provide relays of carriers every ten miles. Delay not. The matter presses."

There could be no mistaking the agitation of the

hidden speaker. That an admitted rival of her father's dynasty should be even the nominal leader of the revolt was not to be endured. The mere suggestion of such a thing was gall and wormwood. None realised better than this arch-priestess of cabal that a predominating influence gained at the outset of a new régime might never be weakened by those who were shut out by circumstances from a share in the control of events. Even the fanatical Moulvie gasped at this intelligence, though his shrewd wit taught him that the rissaldar had not exchanged glances with him without good reason.

"Come, then," said he, "and eat. I have much occupation, and it will free thy hands if I see to the hanging of the Feringhi forthwith."

"Nay, that cannot be," was the cool reply as the two entered the building. "I would not have ridden so hard through the night for the mere stringing up of one Nazarene. By the holy Kaaba, we gave dozens of them a speedier death yesterday."

"What other errand hast thou? The matter touches only the Nazarene's attempt to reach Allahabad, I suppose?"

"That is a small thing. Our brothers at Cawnpore may have secured Allahabad and other towns in the Doab long ere to-day. This Frank comes back with me to Lucknow. If I bring him alive I earn a jaghir¹; if dead, only a few gold mohurs."

"Thy words are strange, brother."

"Not so strange as the need that this Feringhi should live till he reaches Lucknow. He hath in his keeping certain papers that concern the Roshinara Begum of

¹ An estate.

Delhi, and he must be made to confess their whereabouts. So far as that goes, what is the difference between a tree in Rai Bareilly and a tree in Lucknow?"

"True, if the affair presses. Nevertheless, to those who follow me I may have the bestowing of many jaghirs."

"I will follow thee with all haste, O holy one," was the answer, "but a field in a known village is larger than a township in an unknown kingdom. Let me secure this jaghir first, O worthy of honour, and I shall come quickly to thee for the others."

"How came it that the Nawab of Rampur assumed the leadership?" inquired Ahmed Ullah, his mind reverting to the graver topic of the rebellion.

The other scowled sarcastically.

"He is of no account," he muttered. "Was I mistaken in thinking that thou didst not want all my budget opened for a woman? He who gave me a message for thee was the moullah who dwells near the Imambara. Dost thou not know him? Ghazi-ud-din. *He* sent me. 'Tell the Moulvie of Fyzabad that he is wanted—he will understand,' said he. And now, when I have eaten, lead me to the Feringhi. Leave him to me. Within two days I shall have more news for thee."

The name of Ghazi-ud-din, a firebrand of the front rank in Lucknow, proved to Ahmed Ullah that his opportunity had come. He gave orders that the wants of the cavalry officer and his horse were to be attended to, while he himself bustled off to prepare for an immediate journey.

When the Begum and the Moulvie departed for

Lucknow they were accompanied by nearly the whole of their retinue. Two men were left to assist the rissaldar in taking care of the prisoner, and these two vowed by the Prophet that they had never met such a swashbuckler as the stranger, for he used strange oaths that delighted them and told stories of the sacking of Lucknow that made them tingle with envy.

Oddly enough, he was very anxious that the Nazarene's horse should be recovered, and was so pleased when Nejdi was caught in a field on the outskirts of the town and brought in during the afternoon, that he promised his assistants a handful of gold mohurs apiece—when they reached Lucknow.

Once, ere sunset, he visited the prisoner, and cursed him with a fluency that caused all who heard to own that the warriors of the 7th Cavalry must indeed be fine fellows.

At last, when Frank was led forth and helped into the saddle, his guardian's flow of humorous invective reached heights that pleased the villagers immensely. The Nazarene's hands were tied behind him, and the gallant rissaldar, holding the arab's reins, rode by his side. The Moulvie's men followed, and in this guise the quartette quitted Rai Bareilly for the north.

They were about a mile on their way, and the sun was nearing the horizon, when the native officer bade his escort halt.

"Bones of Mohammed!" he cried, "what am I thinking of! My horse has done fifty miles in twenty-four hours, and the Feringhi's probably more than that. Hath not the Moulvie friends in Rai Bareilly who will lend us a spare pair?"

Ahmed Ullah's retainers hazarded the opinion that their master's presence might be necessary ere friendship stood such a strain.

"Then why not make the Nazarene pay for his journey?" said the rissaldar, with grim humour.

He showed skill as a cutpurse in going straight to an inner pocket where Malcolm carried some small store of money. Taking ten gold mohurs, he told the men to hasten back to the village and purchase a couple of strong ponies.

"Nay," said he, when they made to ride off, "you must go afoot, else I may never again see you or the tats. I will bide here till you return. See that you lose no time, but if darkness falls speedily I will await you in the next village."

Not daring to argue with this truculent-looking bravo, the men obeyed. Already it was dusk, and daylight would soon fail. No sooner had they disappeared round the first bend in the road than the rissaldar, unfastening Malcolm's bonds the while, said with a strange humility—

"It was easier done than I expected, sahib, but I guessed that my story about the Nawab of Rampur would send Moulvie and Begum packing. Now we are free, and we have four horses. Whither shall we go? But if it be north, south, east, or west, let us leave the main road, for messengers may meet the Moulvie, and that would make him suspicious."

"Thy counsel is better than mine, good friend," was Frank's answer. "I am yet dazed with thy success, and my only word is—to Allahabad!"

CHAPTER XI

A DAY'S ADVENTURES

THOUGH his arm was stiff and painful, the rough bandaging it had received and the coarse food given him in sufficient quantity at Rai Bareilly had partly restored Malcolm's strength. Nevertheless, he thought his mind was failing when in the dim light of the inner room in which he was confined he saw Chumru standing before him.

His servant's warlike attire was sufficiently bewildering, and the sonorous objurgations with which he was greeted were not calculated to dispel the cloud over his wits, but a whispered sentence gave hope, and hope is a wonderful restorative.

"Pretend not to know me, sahib, and all will be well," said his unexpected ally, and from that instant until they stood together on the Lucknow Road Malcolm had guarded tongue and eye in the firm faith that Chumru would save him.

He was not mistaken. The adroit Mohammedan knew better than to trust his sahib and himself too long on the highway.

"They will surely make search for us, huzoor," he said as they headed across country towards a distant ridge thickly coated with trees. "The Begum and Ahmed Ullah met here for a purpose, and their friends will not fail to tell them of the trouble in Lucknow. I

have been shaking in my boots all day, for 'tis ill resting in the jungle when tigers are loose, but I knew you could not ride in the sun, and I saw no other way of getting rid of the Moulvie's men than that of sending them back in the dark."

"It seems to me," said Malcolm, with a weak laugh, "that you would not have scrupled to knock both of them on the head if necessary."

"No, sahib; they are my kin. He who wore this uniform was a Brahmin, and that makes all the difference. Brother does not slay brother unless there be a woman in dispute."

"When did you leave the Residency?"

"About nine o'clock last night, sahib."

"Did you see the miss-sahib before you came away?"

"It was she who told me whither you had gone, sahib."

"Ah, she knew, then? Did she say aught—send any message?"

"Only that you would be certain to need my help, sahib."

That puzzled Frank. Winifred, of course, had said nothing of the kind, but Chumru assumed that she understood him, so his misrepresentation was quite honest.

A level path now enabled them to canter, and they reached the first belt of trees ten minutes after the Moulvie's men set out for Rai Bareilly. Luck, which was befriending Chumru that day, must have made possible that burst of speed at the right moment. They were discussing their plans in the gloom of a grove of

giant pipals when the clatter of horses hard ridden came from the road they had just quitted.

There could be no doubting the errand that brought a cavalcade thus furiously from the direction of Lucknow. It was so near a thing that for a little while they could not be certain they had escaped unseen. But the riders whirled along towards Rai Bareilly, and in another quarter of an hour the night would be their best guardian.

"That settles it," said Malcolm, in whose veins the blood was now coursing with its normal vitality, though for the same reason, his right forearm ached abominably. "It would be folly to attempt the road again. Let us make for the river. We must find a boat there and get men to take us to Allahabad, either by hire or force."

"How far is it to the river, sahib?"

"About twenty-five miles."

"Praise be to Allah! That is better than seventy, for my feet are weary of that accursed Brahmin's boots."

They stumbled on, leading the horses, until the first dark hour made progress impossible. Then, when the evening mists melted and the stars gave a faint light, they resumed the march, for every mile gained now was worth five at dawn, if perchance their hunters thought of making a circular sweep of the country in the neighbourhood of Rai Bareilly.

It was a glorious night. The rain of the preceding day had freshened the air, and towards midnight the moon sailed into the blue arc overhead, so they were able to mount again and travel at a faster pace. Twice

they were warned by the barking of dogs of the proximity of small villages. They gave these places a wide berth, since there was no knowing what hap might bring a ryot who had seen them into communication with Moulvie's followers.

Each hamlet marked the centre of a cultivated area. They could distinguish the jungle from the arable land almost by the animals they disturbed. A grey wolf, skulking through the sparsely wooded waste, would be succeeded by a herd of timid deer. Then a sounder of pigs, headed by a ten-inch tusker, would scamper out of the border crop, while a pack of jackals, rending the calm night with their maniac yelping, would start every dog within a mile into a frenzy of hoarse barking. Sometimes a fox slunk across their path. Out of many a tuft they drove a startled hare. In the dense undergrowth hummed and rustled a hidden life of greater mystery.

Where water lodged after the rain there were countless millions of frogs, croaking in harsh chorus, and being ceaselessly hunted by the snakes which the monsoon had driven from their nooks and crannies in the rocks.

On such a night all India seems to be dead as a land, but tremendously alive as a storehouse of insects, animals, and reptiles. Even the air has its stranger denizens in the guise of huge beetles and vampire-winged flying-foxes. And that is why men call it the unchanging East. Civilization has made but few marks on its far-flung plains. Its people are either nomads or dwell in huts of mud and straw, and scratch the earth to grow their crops as their forebears have done since the dawn of history.

When the amber and rose tints of dawn gave distance to the horizon, the fugitives estimated that they had traversed some fifteen miles. Malcolm was ready to drop with fatigue. He was wounded ; he had not slept during two nights ; he had fought in a lost battle and ridden sixty-five miles, without counting his exertions on the field of Chinhut. Nejdi and the horse which brought Chumru from Lucknow were nearly exhausted. Even the hardy Mohammedan was haggard and spent, and his oblique eyes glowed like the red embers of a dying fire.

"Sahib," he said, when they came upon a villager and his wife scraping opium from unripe poppy-heads in a field, "unless we rest and eat we shall find no boat on Ganga to-day."

This was so undeniable that Malcolm did not hesitate to ask the ryot for milk and eggs. The man was civil. Indeed he thought the Englishman was some important official, and took Chumru for his native deputy. He threw down the scoop, handed to his wife an earthen vessel half full of the milky sap gathered from the plants, and led the "huzoors" at once to his shieling. Here he produced some ghee and chupatties, and half a dozen raw eggs. The feast might not tempt an epicure, but its components were excellent, and Frank was well aware that the ghee was exceedingly nutritious, though nauseating to European taste, being practically rancid butter made from buffalo milk.

There was plenty of fodder for the horses, too, and they showed their good condition by eating freely. The ryot eyed Chumru doubtingly when Malcolm gave him five rupees. Under ordinary conditions the sahib's

native assistant would demand the return of the money at the first convenient moment, and, indeed, Chumru himself was in the habit of exacting a stiff commission on his master's disbursements. Frank smiled at the man's embarrassed air.

"The money is thine, friend," said he, quietly, "and there is more to be earned if thou art so minded."

"I am but a poor man—" began the ryot.

"Just so. Not every day canst thou obtain good payment for a few hours' work. Now, listen. How far is the Ganges from here?"

"Less than three hours, sahib."

"What, for horses?"

"Not so, sahib. A horse can cover the distance in an hour—if he be not weary."

The peasant could use his eyes, it seemed, but Malcolm passed the phrase without comment.

"We have lost our way," he said. "We want to reach the river and take boat speedily to Allahabad. If one like thyself were willing to ride with us to the nearest village on the bank where boats can be obtained, we would give him ten rupees, and, moreover, let him keep the horse that carried him."

The ryot was delighted with his good fortune.

"Blessed be Kali!" he cried. "I saw five female ghosts with goats' heads in a tree last night, and my wife said it betokened a journey and wealth. Not only can I bring you by the shortest road, huzoor, but my brother has a budgerow moored at the ghat, meaning to carry my castor-oil seeds to Mirzapur. I am not ready for him yet for three weeks or more, and he will ask no

better occupation than to drop down stream with you and your camp."

"I have no camp," said Malcolm, "but I pay the same rates for the boats."

"The sahib means that his camp marches by road," put in Chumru, severely. "Didst not hear him say that we have mislaid the track?"

The ryot apologised for his stupidity, and Frank recognised that his retainer disapproved very strongly of such strict adherence to the truth. On the plea that they must hasten if the midday heat were to be avoided, they cut short the halt to less than an hour. When they came to tighten the girths again, they found that Chumru's horse had fallen lame. As Nejdi, too, was showing signs of stiffness, Malcolm mounted one of the spare animals and led the arab. Chumru and the ryot bestrode the third horse, and, under the guidance of one who knew every path, they set out for the Ganges.

There are few features of the landscape so complex in their windings as the footpaths of India. Owing to the immense distances between towns—the fertile and densely populated Doab offers no standard of comparison for the remainder of a vast continent—roads were scarce and far between in Mutiny days. The Grand Trunk Road and the rivers Ganges and Jumna were the main arteries of traffic. For the rest, men marched across country, and the narrow ribands of field tracks meandered through ploughed land and jungle, traversed nullah and hill and wood, and intersected each other in a tangle that was wholly inextricable unless one travelled by the compass or by well-known landmarks where such were visible.

The ryot, of course, familiar with each yard of the route, practically followed a straight line. After a steady jog of an hour and a half they saw the silver thread of the Ganges from the crest of a small ridge that ran north and south. The river was then about three miles distant, and they were hurrying down the descent when they came upon an ekka, a little native two-wheeled cart, without springs, and drawn by a diminutive pony. Alone among wheeled conveyances, the ekka can leave the main roads in fairly level country, and this one had evidently brought a zamindar from a riverside village.

The man himself, a portly, full-bearded Mohammedan, was examining a growing crop, and his behaviour, no less than the furtive looks cast at the new-comers by his driver, warned Malcolm that here, for a certainty, the Mutiny was a known thing. The zamindar's face assumed a bronze-green tint when he saw the European officer, and the sulky-looking native perched behind the shafts of the ekka growled something in the local patois that caused the ryot sitting behind Chumru to squirm uneasily.

The other glanced hastily around, as though he hoped to find assistance near, and Chumru muttered to his master—

“Have a care, sahib, else we may hop on to a limed twig.”

The boldest course was the best one. Malcolm rode up to the zamindar, who was separated some forty paces from the ekka.

“I come from Lucknow,” he said. “What news is there from Fattehpur and Allahabad?”

The man hesitated. He was so completely taken

aback by the sight of an armed officer riding towards him in broad daylight—for Malcolm, having lost his own sword, had taken Chumru's—that he was hardly prepared to meet the emergency.

"There is little news," he said at last, and it was not lost on his questioner that the customary phrases of respect were omitted, though he spoke civilly enough.

"Nevertheless, what is it?" demanded Frank. "Has the Mutiny spread thus far, or is it confined to Cawnpore?"

"I know not what you mean," was the self-contained answer. "In this district we are peaceable people. We look after our crops, even as I am engaged at this moment, and have no concern with what goes on elsewhere."

"A most worthy and honourable sentiment, and I trust it will avail you when we have hanged all these rebels and we come to inquire into the conduct of your village. I want you to accompany me now, and place my orderly and myself on board a boat for Allahabad."

"That is impossible—sahib"—and the word came reluctantly—"there are no boats on the river these days."

"Why not?"

"They are all away, carrying grain and hay."

"What, then, are your crops so forward? This one will not be ready for harvesting ere another month."

"You will not find a budgerow on this side. Perchance they will ferry you across at the village, in a small boat, and you will have better accommodation at Fattehpur."

"Are we opposite Fattehpur?"

"Yes—sahib."

All the while the zamindar's eyes were looking furtively from Frank to the lower ground. It was a puzzling situation. The man was not actively hostile, yet his manner betrayed an undercurrent of fear and dislike that could only be accounted for by the downfall of British power in the locality. Thinking Chumru could deal better with his fellow-countryman, Malcolm called him, breaking in on a lively conversation that was going on between his servant and the ekka-wallah.

Chumru, who had told the ryot to dismount, came at once.

"Our friend here says that things are quiet on the river, but there are no boats to be had," explained Malcolm. Chumru grinned, and the zamindar regarded him with troubled eyes.

"Excellent," he said. "We shall go to his house and wait while his servants look for a boat."

This suggestion seemed to please the other man.

"I will go on in front in the ekka," he agreed, "and lead you to my dwelling speedily."

Chumru edged nearer his master while their new acquaintance walked towards the ekka.

"Jump down and tie both when I give the word, sahib," he whispered. "There has been murder done here."

Malcolm understood instantly that his native companion had found the ekka-wallah more communicative. In fact, Chumru had fooled the man by pretending a willingness to slay the Feringhi forthwith, and the sheep-like ryot was now livid with terror at the prospect of witnessing an immediate killing.

When the zamindar was close to the ekka Chumru whipped out one of the Brahmin's cavalry pistols.

"Now, sahib!" he cried. Malcolm drew his sword and sprang down. The zamindar fell on his knees.

"Spare my life, huzoor, and I will tell thee everything," he roared.

Were he not so worn with fatigue, and were not the issues depending on the man's revelations so important, Malcolm could have laughed at this remarkable change of tone. The flabby, well-fed rascal squealed like a pig when the point of the sword touched his skin, and the Englishman was forced to scowl fiercely to hide a smile.

"Speak, *sug*,¹" he said. "What of Fattehpur and Allahabad, and be sure thou hast spent thy last hour if thou liest."

"Sahib, God knoweth that I can tell thee naught of Allahabad, but the budmashes at Fattehpur have risen, and Tucker-sahib is dead. They killed him, I have heard, after a fight on the roof of the cutcherry."

Malcolm guessed rightly that Mr Tucker was the judge at that station, but he must not betray ignorance.

"And the others—they who fled? What of them?" he said, knowing that the scenes enacted elsewhere must have had their counterpart at Fattehpur.

"Wow!" The kneeling man flinched as the sword pricked him again. "There are two mems² in a house near the ghat. They alone remain of those who crossed. And I saved them, sahib. I swear it, by the Kaaba, I saved them."

"They are young, doubtless, and good-looking?"

¹ A contemptuous use of the word "dog."

² Short for mem-sahibs: ladies.

A new fear shone in the Mohammedan's eyes, and he did not answer. Frank's gorge rose with a deadly disgust, and it is hard to say that his sword would not have gone home in another instant had not Chumru interfered.

"Kill him not yet, sahib. He may be useful. Bind him and the other slave back to back. Then I shall help you to truss them properly."

Chumru soon showed that he meant business. When he was free to replace the pistol in the holster, which he did all the more readily since he had never used a firearm in his life, he gagged master and man with skill, tied them to a tree, and then unfolded the plan which the ekka-driver's story had suggested.

The fever of rebellion had spread along the whole of the left bank of the Ganges as far as Allahabad. A party of fugitives from Fattehpur who had taken to a boat were pursued, captured, and slain. Two girls who had managed to cross the river unseen were now lodged in a go-down, or warehouse, belonging to the very man whom chance had made Malcolm's prisoner. He was keeping them to curry favour with a local rajah who headed the outbreak at Fattehpur. It was true that there were no boats left on this side of the river; they were all on the opposite bank, being loaded with loot, and the two Englishwomen were merely awaiting the return of the zamindar's budgerow to be sent to a fate worse than death.

Chumru, a Mohammedan himself, was not greatly concerned about the misfortunes of a couple of women, but he saw plainly that Malcolm could no more hope to escape under present conditions than the poor creatures

whose whereabouts had just become known. This was precisely the blend of intrigue and adventure that appealed to his alert intelligence. In wriggling through a mesh of difficulties he was lithe as a snake, and the proposal he now made was certainly bold enough to commend itself to the most daring.

He drew Malcolm and the trembling ryot apart.

"Listen, friend," said he to the latter. "Thou art, indeed, lost if that fat hog sees thee again. He will harry thee and thy wife and all thy family to death for having helped us, and it will be in vain to protest that thou hadst no mind in the matter, for behold, thou didst not lift a finger when I threatened him with the pistol."

"Protector of the poor, what was one to do?" whined the ryot.

"I am not thy protector. 'Tis the sahib here to whom thou must look for counsel. Attend, now, and I will show thee a road to safety and riches. Art thou known to either of those men?"

"I have not seen them before, for I come this way but seldom."

"'Tis well. The sahib shall sit in the ekka, with the curtains drawn, while I give it out that I go with my wife to take the miss-sahibs across the river, for which purpose the worthy zamindar will presently hand us a written order, as he hath ink, paper, and pen in the ekka. Thou shalt be driver and come with us on the boat, and when we are in mid-stream, and the sahib appears at my signal, see that thou hast a cudgel handy if it be needed. Then, when we reach Allahabad, God willing, the sahib will give thee

many rupees and none will be the wiser. What say'st thou?"

"I am a poor man—"

"Ay, keep to that. 'Tis ever a safe answer. Do you like my notion, sahib? Otherwise we must take our chance and wander in the jungle."

The fact that Chumru's scheme included the rescue of the unhappy girls imprisoned in the go-down caused Malcolm to approve it without reserve. The zamindar's gag was removed and he was asked his name.

"Hossein Beg," said he.

"Be assured, then," said Malcolm, sternly, "that thy life depends on the fulfilment of the instructions I now require of thee. See to it, therefore, that they are written in such wise as to insure success, and I, for my part, promise to send thee succour ere night falls. Write on this tablet that the miss-sahibs are to be delivered to the charge of Rissaldar Ali Khan and his wife, for conveyance to Fattehpur, and bid thy servants help the rissaldar in every possible way. Believe me, if aught miscarries in this matter, thou shalt rot to death in thy bonds."

"Let my servant go with your honour, so that all things may be done according to your honour's wishes."

"What then? Wouldst thou juggle with the favour I have shown thee?"

This time the sword impinged on the Adam's apple in Hossein Beg's throat, and he shrank as far as his bonds would permit.

"Say not so. Khudáwand,"¹ he gurgled. "I swear by my father's bones I meant no ill."

¹ Master.

"Mayhap. Nevertheless, I shall take care thy intent is honest, Hossein Beg. Write now, and pay heed to thy words, else jackals shall rend thee ere to-morrow's dawn."

By this time the man was reduced to a state of abject submission. Possibly his offer of the ekka-wallah's services was made in good faith, but Malcolm liked the looks of the man as little as he liked the looks of his master, and he preferred to trust to Chumru's nimble wits rather than the stupid contriving of a peasant, no matter how willing the latter might be.

The zamindar, having written, was gagged again, and the pair were left to that torture of silence and doubt they had not scrupled to inflict on those who had done them no wrong. They were tied to a tree-trunk in the heart of a clump, and a hundred men might pass in that lonely place without discovering them, whereas Hossein Beg and his subordinate could see easily enough through the leafy screen that enveloped their open-air prison.

Half an hour later Hossein Beg's ekka arrived on the open space that adjoined the village ghat. At one end was a mosque, at the other a temple. In the centre, at a little distance from the bank, was a square modern building, evidently the warehouse in which the English ladies were pent.

With the ekka came a rissaldar of cavalry, riding one horse and leading two others. When he dismounted a scabbard clattered at his heels, for Malcolm now had the pistols between his knees as he sat behind the tightly-drawn curtains of the vehicle.

"Mohammed Rasul!" shouted the rissaldar, loudly. "Where is Mohammed Rasul? I must discourse with him instantly."

A man came running.

"Ohé, sirdar," he cried. "Behold, I come."

A note was thrust into the runner's hands.

"Read, and quickly," was the imperious order. "I have affairs at Fattehpur, and cannot wait here long. Is there a boat to be hired?"

"A budgerow is even now approaching, leader of the faithful."

"Good. There is some disposition to be made of two Feringhi women. Read that which Hossein Beg hath written, and make haste, I pray thee, brother."

Perhaps Mohammed Rasul wondered why his employer wrote in such imploring strain that he was to obey the worshipful "Ali Khan's" slightest word, and bestow him and his belongings, together with the two prisoners, on board a boat for Fattehpur with the utmost speed. However that may be, he lost no time. The budgerow was warped close to the ghat, her contents, mostly European furniture, as Malcolm could see through a fold in the curtain, were promptly unloaded, and preparations made for the return journey. First, the horses were led on board and secured. Then two pallid girls, only half-clothed, their eyes red with weeping and their cheeks haggard with misery, were led from the go-down.

"Ali Khan" was about to guide the ekka along the rough gangway when Mohammed Rasul interfered.

"My master says naught concerning the ekka and pony," said he. "He hath detained Gobi, and this driver is unknown to me. Who will bring them back when they have served your needs, sirdar?"

"I will attend to that," replied Chumru, gruffly, and Hossein Beg's factotum had perforce to be content with the undertaking.

But fate, which had certainly favoured Malcolm and his native comrade thus far, played them what looked like a jade's trick at the very moment when success was within their grasp. The ekka pony, frightened by the lap of the swift-flowing water against the steps beneath, shied, backed, and strove to reach the shore. Not all Chumru's wiry strength, aided by the alarmed ryot, could prevent the brute from turning. A wheel slipped off the staging, the narrow vehicle toppled over, and the amazed spectators saw a booted and spurred British officer of cavalry sprawling on the ghat instead of the veiled Mohammedan woman who ought to have made her appearance in this undignified manner.

Malcolm was on his feet in a second.

"Come on, Chumru!" he cried, as he leaped on board the budgerow. He saw one of the crew take an extra turn of a rope round a cat-head, and fired at him. Hit or miss, the fellow tumbled overboard, and his mates followed. Chumru, assisted by the ryot, who elected at this twelfth hour to throw in his lot with that of the sahib, began to cast off the cables. Even the two dazed girls helped, once they knew that an Englishman was fighting in their behalf.

To add to the excitement on shore, Malcolm fired the second pistol at the men nearest to the boat, which was

already beginning to slip away with the current. Then he rushed to the helm, unlashed it, and turned the boat's head toward the channel, while Chumru and the ryot, helped by the girls, hauled at the heavy mat sail.

Having lashed the helm again in order to keep the budgerow on the starboard tack, Malcolm was about to lend a hand, despite his wound, when a spurt of firing from the bank took him by surprise, because he had seen neither gun nor pistol in the hands of the loungers on the ghat, and the coolies were certainly unarmed.

Glancing back, he saw a man whom he had last seen in the Moulvie's company at Rai Bareilly gesticulating fiercely as he directed the target practice of a number of men. A group of lathered horses behind them showed that they had ridden far and fast, so the accident which nearly led to his undoing had really helped to save him and his companions, else the fusillade to which they were now subjected must have taken place while the boat was still tied to the wharf.

"Lie flat on the deck," he shouted in English, and repeated the words in Hindustani. He flung himself down by Chumru's side.

"Haul away!" he gasped. "We will soon be out of range."

Thus, while the cumbrous sail creaked and groaned as it slowly climbed the mast, and bullets cut through the matting or were imbedded in the stout woodwork, the latest argosy of Malcolm's fortunes thrust herself with ever-increasing speed into the ample breast of Mother Ganga. Soon the firing ceased. Malcolm

raised his head. The excited mob on the shore was already a horde of Lilliputians, and the placid swish of the river around the roomy craft told him that he was actually free, and on the way to Allahabad once more.



CHAPTER XII

THE SWING OF THE PENDULUM

MALCOLM'S first measured thought was an unpleasant one. It was his intent to land one of the budgerow's crew at the earliest opportunity with a written message, which the bearer would probably be unable to read, addressed to Mohammed Rasul, bidding him go to the assistance of the unlucky Hossein Beg. That plan was now impracticable. The crew had bolted. He could neither send the ryot ashore nor trust to the help of any neighbouring village, since men were already galloping along the left bank with obviously hostile designs.

As there was a favourable breeze, and the current was swift and strong, he wondered why these pursuers strove to keep the boat in sight. Then it was borne in on him that they had a definite object. Could it be possible that they knew of the presence of other craft, lower down the river?—that he might be called on within the hour to make a last stand against irresistible odds on the deck of the budgerow?

Rather than meet certain death in that way, he would head boldly for the opposite shore, and trust again to his tired horses for escape to the jungle and the night.

Yet some plan must be devised to keep faith with that wretched zamindar. The man would not die if left where he was for another forty-eight hours, or even longer; but the word of a sahib was a sacred thing.

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Whatever the difficulty of communicating with Mohammed Rasul, he must overcome it somehow.

In his perplexity, his eyes fell on the two girls. Being ladies from Futtehpur, they might be able to help him with some knowledge of the locality. Summoning Chumru to take the helm, he went forward and spoke to them.

Now, it is an enduring fact that a woman's regard for her personal appearance will engross her mind when graver topics might well be to the fore. No sooner did these sorrow-laden daughters of Eve realise that they were in a position of comparative safety, and in the company of a good-looking young man of their own race, than they attempted to effect some change in their toilette. A handkerchief dipped in the river, a few twists and coilings of refractory hair, a slight readjustment of disordered bodices and crumpled skirts, above all, the gleam of the magic lamp of hope that illumined an abyss of despair, and the amazing result was that Malcolm found two pretty, shy, tremulous maidens awaiting him, instead of the dishevelled, woebegone women he had seen pushed down the steps of the ghat.

He introduced himself, with the well-mannered courtesy of the period, and, in response, the elder of the pair raised her blue eyes to his and told him that since the 16th of June until the previous day they had been hiding in the hut of a native woman, mother of their ayah.

"My dear father was killed by Mr Tucker's side," said she. "He was the Deputy-Commissioner of Fatthehpur. Keene is our name—I am Harriet, this is my

sister Grace. We only came out from England last cold weather—”

A sudden recollection brought a cry of surprise from Frank.

“Why,” he said, “you were fellow-passengers on the *Assaye* with Miss Winifred Mayne?”

“Yes; do you know her? What has become of her? We were told that everyone at Meerut was killed.”

“Thank Heaven, she was alive and well when I last saw her, three days ago.”

“And her uncle? Is he living? She was very much attached to him. How did she escape from Meerut?” broke in Grace, eagerly.

“I wish they had never left Meerut. The mutiny at that station collapsed in a couple of hours. Unfortunately they are now both penned up in the Residency at Lucknow, which is surrounded by goodness only knows how many thousands of rebels. But I must give you Winifred’s recent history at another time. I want you to tell me something about this neighbourhood. What is the nearest town on the river, and which bank is it on?”

“Unfortunately, our acquaintance with this part of India is very slight,” said Miss Harriet Keene, sadly. “We remained at Calcutta four months with our mother, who died there, without having seen our dear father after a separation of five years. We came up country in March, and were going to Naini Tal¹ when the Mutiny broke out. We only saw the Ganges three or four times before our ayah brought us across on that terrible night when father was murdered.”

¹ A hill station near Lucknow.

Malcolm had heard many such tensely dramatic stories from fugitives who had reached Lucknow during July. Phrases of pity or consolation were powerless in face of these tragedies. But he could not forbear asking one question—

“How did you come to fall into the hands of Hossein Beg?”

“We were betrayed by some children,” was the simple answer. “They saw our ayah’s mother baking chupatties, day by day, sufficient for four people. My sister and I lived nearly three weeks in a cow-byre, never daring, of course, to approach even the door. The children made some talk about the lavish food supply in the old woman’s hut, and the story reached the ears of their father. He, like all the other natives here, seems to hate Europeans as though they were his deadliest enemies. He spied on us, discovered our whereabouts, and yesterday morning we were dragged forth, while the poor creatures to whom we owed our lives were beaten to death with sticks before our very eyes.”

The speaker was a fair English girl of twenty. Her sister was eighteen, and their previous experience of the storm and fret of existence was drawn from an uneventful childhood in India, four years in a Brighton school, and a twelvemonth in a Brussels convent!

Malcolm choked back the hard words that rose to his lips, and sought such local information as the ryot could give him. It was little. The tiller of the Indian fields lives and dies in his village, and has no interests beyond the horizon. This man visited the Ganges once a year on a religious feast, and perhaps twice in the same period in connection with the shipping of grain on his brother’s

boat. To that extent, but no further, did his store of general knowledge pass beyond the narrower limits of those who dwelt far from a river highway.

Yet it was he who first espied a new and most active peril.

"Look, huzoor," he cried suddenly. "They have made signs to the Fattehpur ghat. Two boats are following us."

And then Malcolm found that the real danger came from the opposite shore. It was a case of falling on Scylla when trying to avoid Charybdis. He learnt afterwards that the rebels had organised a code of signals from bank to bank, owing to the number of craft with Europeans on board that sought safety in flight down the river. That some device must have drawn pursuit from the right bank was obvious. A couple of roomy budgerows, with sails set, were racing after him, and the long sweeps on board each boat were being propelled by willing arms.

It must be confessed that a feeling of bitter resentment against this last stroke of ill-luck rose in Malcolm's breast for an instant. He conquered it. He recalled Lawrence's bold advice—"Never surrender," and that inspiring memory brought strength.

At that point the Ganges was about a mile and a quarter in width. The budgerow was some six hundred yards distant from the left bank. Three miles ahead the river curved to the left round a steep promontory. The farther shore was marsh land, so it might be assumed that a hidden barrier of rock flung off the deep current there, while the one chance of escape that presented itself was to steer for that very spot and effect a landing

before the enemy could head off the budgerow and force it under the fire of the horsemen. The Fattehpur boats were a mile in the rear, but that advantage would be greatly lessened if Malcolm crossed the stream, and perhaps altogether effaced by the powerful sweeps at their command.

However, to cross was the only way, and the only way is ever the best way. Having once made up his mind, Frank coolly reviewed the situation. Food was the first essential. The boat itself, having been used for carrying hay, contained sufficient sweepings to feed the horses, and he set the ryot to work on gathering the odds and ends of forage. A brief search brought to light a quantity of ghee, boiled rice, and dried peas. He divided the store into five portions, and set a good example to the others by compelling himself to eat the cooked food at once, while the peas went into his pockets to be crushed or chewed at leisure.

Chumru kept the budgerow steadily on her course, and ere many minutes elapsed it was plain to be seen that the rebels were alive to the tactics of their quarry. Fresh gangs manned the sweeps, and the riders on the eastern bank eased their pace to a walk. The space between pursuers and pursued began to decrease. At the outset Frank thought that this was the natural outcome of his plan, and gave no heed to it beyond the ever-growing anxiety of the time problem.

But at the end of the first mile he was seriously concerned at finding that the mutineers were gaining on him in an incomprehensible manner. The boat was then seemingly in mid-stream, while the enemy kept close to the shore, and they were certainly travelling half as fast

again, a difference in speed that the use of the oars hardly accounted for.

He kept on grimly, however, never deviating from his perspective, which was the swampy ground on the outer curve of the bend. It was not until nearly another mile was covered and the mutineers were almost abreast in the true line of the river, that he knew why they were making such heart-breaking progress as compared with his own craft. The Ganges, after the vagrom fashion of all giant rivers, was cutting a new bed through the sunken reefs towards the low-lying marsh. At the wide elbow there were really two channels, and he was now sailing along the comparatively motionless water between them!

Side by side with this terrifying discovery was the certain fact that his awkwardly-built craft would gain little by manœuvring. There was a new danger, too. At any instant she might run ashore on the shoal that was surely forming in the centre of the river. At all costs that must be avoided.

With a smile and a few confident words to the girls, he went aft, took the helm from Chumru, and bade him help the ryot in putting out the port sweep. The effect was quickly apparent. The budgerow ran into the second channel, but she allowed her dangerous rivals to approach so close that the natives opened fire with long-range dropping shots.

It was now a matter of minutes ere the rebel marksmen would render the deck uninhabitable. To beach the boat, land the horses, and get the young ladies ashore in safety had become an absolute impossibility. Then it occurred to Frank that the Fattehpur men could not

know for certain that there were Englishwomen on board. They could see Chumru, the ryot, the horses, and, of course, the steersman, but the girls were seated in the well amidships, these river craft being only partly decked fore and aft.

A modification of his scheme flashed through his brain, and he decided to adopt it forthwith. First asking Miss Keene and her sister not to reveal their presence, no matter what happened, he told Chumru to stand by the horses and help him to make them leap into the water when he gave the order. With difficulty he induced the scared ryot to take the rudder while he explained the new project. It had that element of daring in it that is worthy of success, being nothing less than an attempt to draw the rebels' attention entirely to himself and Chumru by making a dash for the shore, while the ryot was to allow the boat to continue her course down stream with, apparently, no other tenant than himself.

Malcolm's theory was that if he and Chumru made good their landing, they would hug the river until the budgerow was sufficiently ahead of pursuit to permit of her being run ashore.

Though the plan savoured of deserting the helpless girls, yet he was strong-minded enough to adopt it. It substituted a forlorn hope for imminent and unavoidable death or capture, and it gave one last avenue of achievement to the mission on which he had come from Lucknow.

At the final moment he communicated it to the two sisters. They agreed to abide by his decision, and the elder one said, with a calm serenity that lent to her words the symbolism of a prayer—

"We are all in God's hands, Mr Malcolm. Whether we live or die, we are assured that you have done and will do all that lies in the power of a Christian gentleman to save us."

"I don't like leaving you," he murmured, "but our only weapons are a sword and a brace of empty pistols. If we run on another half-mile we shall be shot down where we stand without any means of defending ourselves. On the other hand—"

Then the budgerow struck a submerged rock with a violence that must have pitched him overboard were he not holding Nejdi's headstall at the moment. She careened so badly that the girls shrieked, and Malcolm himself thought she would turn turtle. But she swung clear, righted herself, and lay broadside on to the current. Another crash, less violent, but even more disastrous, tore away the rudder and wrenched the spar pulley out of the top of the mast. The heavy sail fell, of course, but by some miracle left the occupants of the boat uninjured.

And now the maimed craft was carried along sluggishly, drifting back towards the centre of the river, while the men in the other boats set up a fiendish yell of delight at the catastrophe that had overtaken the doomed Feringhis. Their skilled boatmen evidently knew of this reef. They stood away towards the shore, but the triumphant jeering that came from the crowded decks showed that they meant to pass their dismantled quarry and wait in safer waters until it lumbered down upon them.

Malcolm suddenly became aware of his wounded arm. With a curious fatalism he began to dissect his emotions.

He arrived at the conclusion that the drop from the nervous tension of hope to the relaxation of sheer despair had dulled his brain and weakened his physical powers. This, then, was the end. There could be no doubt about it. He quieted the startled horses with a word or two, and spoke to the girls again.

"You may as well come on deck now," he said. "It is all up with us. If a friendly bullet puts us out of our misery so much the better. Otherwise, my advice to you both is to leap into the river rather than be recaptured."

Grace was sobbing hysterically, but Harriet, clasping her fondly in her arms, looked up at him.

"No," she said, "we must not do that. Our lives are not our own. The Lord gave, and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord!"

Frank winced in his anguish. To a puissant man there is nothing so galling as helplessness. What a game of battledore and shuttlecock had been played with him and those bound up with his fortunes since the Moulvie's man-trap brought him headlong to the earth in the main street of Rai Bareilly!

"Huzoor!" yelled Chumru, excitedly. "Look! There below! A smoke ship! And see! Those sons of pigs are making for the bank!"

Malcolm could scarce believe his eyes when they rested on a small steamer, with the British flag flying from the masthead, coming round the bend. Yet there could be no mistake about it. British officers in white uniforms were standing on her bridge; the muzzles of a couple of guns showed black and businesslike over her bows, while her forward deck was packed with men in

the uniform of the Madras Fusiliers. Her commander seemed to take in the exact position of affairs at a glance, and, indeed, the half-wrecked and almost empty boat in mid-stream, so eagerly followed by two thickly-crowded craft, now close-hauled and putting forth desperate efforts to reach the bank, presented a riddle easy to read.

That twinge of pain quitted Frank's arm as speedily as it had made its presence felt. He helped the girls to the raised deck, so that the people on the steamer could see them. It was not necessary. An officer waved a hand to them as the sturdy little vessel dashed past, raising a mighty spume of white froth with her paddles, and soon her guns were busy.

There was no question of quarter. Captain Spurgin had been with Neill at Allahabad. He knew the story of Massacre Ghat, of Delhi, of Sitapore, Moradabad, Bareilly, and a score other stations in Oudh and the North-West. His gunners pelted the unwieldy budgerows with round shot until they began to sink. Then he used grape and rifle fire, until, five minutes after the *Warren Hastings* came on the scene, there was naught left of the Fattehpur navy save some shattered wreckage and a few wretches who strove to swim amidst a hail of lead and in a river infested with crocodiles.

When the steamer dropped down stream and picked up the fugitives, Malcolm learnt that Spurgin was co-operating with Renaud. The one cleared the river, the other was hanging men on nearly every tree that lined the Grand Trunk Road. And Havelock, nobly aided by Neill, was moving heaven and earth to equip a strong

force at Allahabad to avenge Cawnpore, and raise the expected siege of Lucknow.

As Malcolm himself brought the earliest news of the investment, he and Chumru were put ashore with a small escort, in order that they might join Major Renaud's column, and hurry to Havelock with his thrilling tidings. Spurgin promised to visit the village on the east bank, release Hossein Beg, and make him a hostage for the ryot's welfare. As for Harriet and Grace Keene, they would be sent south as soon as a carriage could be procured.

The two girls bade Frank farewell with a gratitude which was embarrassing, but Grace, more mercurial than Harriet, ventured to say:—

"I suppose you are longing to see Winifred again, Mr Malcolm?"

"Yes," he replied, well knowing the thought that lay behind the words. "You are her friend, so there is no reason why I should not tell you that she is my promised wife."

"Then you are both to be congratulated," put in the elder sister, "for she is quite the most charming girl we know, and our opinion of you is not likely to be a poor one after to-day's experiences."

"What? After an hour's acquaintance?"

"An hour! There are some hours that are half a lifetime. Good-bye. May Heaven guard and watch over you!"

Renaud despatched Lawrence's messenger to the south in a dak-gharry, or post carriage. Chumru would have taken the servant's usual perch beside the driver, but Malcolm would not hear of it. His faithful attendant

was almost as worn with fatigue as he himself; master and man shared the comfort of the roomy vehicle, and slept for many hours while it rumbled along the road.

At dawn of the 4th of July they entered Allahabad. But the driver had his orders, and did not stop in the city. They passed through a sullen bazaar, and were gazed at by a mob that wore the aspect of a cageful of tigers in which order has just been induced by the liberal use of red-hot irons. The travellers were nodding asleep again when the sharp summons of a British sentry gladdened Malcolm's ears.

"Who goes there?"

How alert it sounded! How reminiscent of the old days! How full of promise of the days that were to come!

He leaned out, and smiled as he told a stolid private of the 64th that he was "a friend." His uniform acted as a passport, the dak-gharry crossed the drawbridge and crept through a narrow tunnel, and he found himself standing in the great inner parade-ground of the fort. A young officer approached.

"Do you wish to see the general? Whom shall I report?" he asked, eyeing the worn appearance and torn and blood-stained uniforms of Englishman and native.

"I am from Lucknow," said Frank. "Will you kindly tell General Havelock that Captain Malcolm, of the 3rd Cavalry, has brought him a message from Sir Henry Lawrence?"

It was the first time he had described himself by his new rank. It sent a pleasant tingle through his veins,

and made that injured arm of his ache again. Lawrence had given him to the 4th, and here he was in Allahabad on the very date of his chief's reckoning, after having gone through adventures that would have satiated Ulysses.

But the pardonable pride of a young and gallant soldier soon yielded to an inexplicable sensation of humility when he was brought before a small, slender, erect man, grey-haired, eagle-nosed, with strangely bright and piercing eyes, and a mouth habitually set in a thin, straight line.

This was Sir Henry Havelock, and Frank felt instantly that he was in the presence of one who lived in a world apart from his fellows.

And, in truth, Havelock would have been better understood by Cromwell's Ironsides than by his own generation. He was outside the ordinary run of mankind. Though aware of a natural timidity, he fought with and conquered it, until his soldiers refused to believe that Havelock knew what fear was.

Conscious of his own military genius, he had borne without comment or complaint a constant supersession by inferiors, and in an age when levity of thought and manners among officers was often looked upon as the hall-mark of distinguished social position, he lost no opportunity of giving his men religious instruction, while every act of his life was governed by a stern sense of duty.

Such was the man who listened to Malcolm's account of the proceedings which led up to the disastrous battle of Chinhut.

"You say you rode straight from the field on the

evening of the 30th," said he, when Frank had delivered his message of Lucknow's plight. "How did you travel, and in what state did you find the country you traversed?"

Then Frank told him all that had taken place. More than once the young officer would have cut short the recital, but this Havelock would not permit. His son was present, that younger Havelock who lived for forty years to keep ever in the public memory a glorious name, and often the father would turn towards him and punctuate Malcolm's tale with a nod, or a brief, "Do you hear that, Harry?"

At last the stirring chronicle was ended.

"Do you wish to remain here and recuperate, or will you join my staff, with the rank of major?" asked Havelock.

Malcolm was hardly able to stammer his acceptance of the appointment thus offered, but the general had no time for useless talk.

"About this servant of yours—he seems to have the making of a soldier in him—will he care to retain the rank he has assumed so creditably?" he went on.

Frank rather lost his breath at this suggestion, but he had the presence of mind to refer the decision to Chumru himself.

"Kubbi nahin, general-sahib,"¹ was the Mohammedan's emphatic disclaimer of the honour proposed to be conferred on him. "I am a good bearer, huzoor, but I should prove a very bad rissaldar. I am not of a fighting caste. I am a man of peace."

"I think you are mistaken," said Havelock, quietly,

¹ Literally, "Never no, general!"

“but by all means continue to serve your master. I am sure he is worthy of your devotion. And now, Major Malcolm, report yourself to General Neill, and he will provide you with quarters and plenty of work.”

CHAPTER XIII

THE MEN WHO WORE SKIRTS

THAT was what the rebels called the 78th, "the men who wore skirts."

Now, Highland regiments had fought in India for many a year before the Mutiny, and the kilt was no new thing in native eyes. The phrase, therefore, is significant. It crystallises the legend that went round—that an army of savage English was marching from Allahabad, and that its most ferocious corps was dressed in skirts, the men having sworn never to assume male clothing until they had avenged their murdered women-folk.

There could be no better proof that the sepoys and their helpers were well aware that they had outraged all the laws of war and humanity by their excesses, and there was a further reason why the garb of old Gaul was more dreaded throughout India than any other British uniform during the autumn and cold weather of 1857. Not many Europeans knew it until long afterwards, but the natives knew, and told the story with bated breath, and one British officer knew, for he was with the Seaforth Highlanders in Cawnpore when they took dire vengeance for the Well.

It is a matter of history how Havelock marched his little army of twelve hundred men along the Grand Trunk Road from Allahabad. He led a thousand British

soldiers, drawn from the 64th, 84th, and 78th Foot, and the 1st Madras Fusiliers. Captain Brasyer brought one hundred and thirty loyal Sikhs to the column, there were six small guns and eighteen volunteer cavalry.

These details should be appreciated before it is possible to understand the supra-miraculous campaign Havelock conducted. For five days the expedition tramped north in the rain and heat, through a land given over to dead men, vultures, and carnivorous animals. Renaud and Spurgin had made no prisoners. They did not slay wantonly, but the slightest shadow of suspicion falling on any man meant the short shrift of a rope and the nearest tree.

At last, on the 12th of August, the main body overtook Renaud, whose patrols were stopped by a large force of rebels entrenched in a village four miles south of Fattehpur. The junction took place at one o'clock in the morning. At daybreak Havelock sent Colonel Tytler, with the eighteen volunteer horse, to reconnoitre. The enemy's cavalry, thinking they had only Renaud's tiny detachment to deal with, charged across the plain, to find the whole twelve hundred drawn up to receive them. Struck with a sudden fear, the white-coated troopers reined in their horses. This was the first real check Nana Sahib had received. It was typical of the new order. The flood-tide of mutiny had met its barrier rock. Thenceforth it ebbed, though it raged madly for a while in the effort to sweep away the obstruction.

Without giving the enemy's cavalry time to recover from their surprise, Havelock threw forward his infantry, Captain Maude, of the Royal Artillery, rushed his six guns to a point-blank range, there was a short and sharp

fight, and the rebels broke. They were chased through and out of the town of Fattehpur. All their guns and some valuable stores were captured, and, greatest marvel in a day of marvels, not one British soldier had fallen !

No wonder Havelock wrote to his wife—"One of the prayers oft repeated since my schooldays has been answered, and I have lived to command in a successful action. . . . But away with vainglory ! Thanks be to God, who gave me the victory."

That evening Malcolm witnessed the plundering of Fattehpur, which was permitted in retribution for its recent rebellion. The town lay on the main road, which at this point was removed from the river by many miles, else he would have ridden to the ghat and sent a message to Hossein Beg in order to make sure of the safety of the friendly ryot.

Owing to his knowledge of the vernacular, he managed to pick up a bit of useful information while questioning a native on this matter. On the battlefield he came across a state elephant which had been shot through the body by one of Maude's nine-pounders. The manner of the beast's death was remarkable ; it is not often that an elephant is bowled over by a cannon-ball like a rabbit by a bullet from a small calibre rifle, and its trappings betokened that it had carried a person of importance.

Now he learned that Tantia Topi was the rider, and it was thus he discovered that Nana Sahib was directing the operations from Cawnpore, as Tantia Topi was his favourite lieutenant, whereas it was believed previously that the Brahmin usurper would lead his hosts to take part in the siege of Lucknow.

On the 15th, a sharp fight gave the British possession of the village of Aong. The position was dearly won, for the gallant Renaud fell there, mortally wounded. The men were about to prepare their breakfast after the battle when news came that the enemy, strongly reinforced from Cawnpore, were preparing to blow up a bridge over the Pandoo Nuddee, an unfordable tributary of the Ganges six miles ahead. Havelock called for a special effort, the troops responded without a murmur, and advanced through dense groves of mango trees until they came under fire. For the second time that day they hurled themselves on the rebels, drove them headlong out of a well-chosen position, and saved the bridge.

Cawnpore was now only twenty-three miles distant. With the fickleness of the rainy season the sky had cleared, and the sun beat down on the British force with a fury that had not been experienced before that year, though the hot weather of 1857 was noted for its exceedingly high temperature.

The elements seemed to have joined with man to try and stop the advance, but neither Indian sun nor Indian sepoy could restrain that terrible host.

Dogged and uncomplaining, animated rather by the feelings of the infuriated tigress seeking reprisals for her slain cubs than by the sentiments of soldiers engaged in an ordinary campaign, they pressed on until sixteen miles of that sun-scorched road were covered.

Then Havelock commanded a halt in a grove of trees, and two level-headed sepoys, deserters from Nana Sahib's army, came in and told the British general that the Nana had brought 5,000 men out of Cawnpore to do battle for his tottering dynasty. It was in vain.

Though he displayed some tactical skill, placed his men well, and did not hesitate to come under fire in person, he was out-generalled by a flank march and sent flying to Bithoor, there to curse his fate, befuddle his wits with brandy, and threaten to drown himself in the Ganges.

But the battle was not won until one of those strange incidents happened that distinguish the Mutiny from all other wars. It must never be forgotten that the sepoy had received their training from British officers. Their words of command, methods of fighting, even their uniforms, were based on European models.

They had regimental bands, too, and the tunes in their repertoire were those in vogue in Britain, for native music does not lend itself to military purposes. The musicians, of course, were profoundly ignorant of the names or significance of the melodies they had been taught to play.

Hence, when Nana Sahib rallied his men in a village, Havelock called on the Highlanders and 64th to take it, and the two regiments entered into a gallant race for the position, while the Highland pipers struck up an inspiring pibroch. Not to be outdone, a sepoy band responded with, "The Campbells are Coming"!

And this, of all airs, to the Mackenzies! It was chance, of course, but it added gall to the venom of the 78th.

This fourth and greatest victory was a costly one to the British, but it left their ardour undiminished, their reckless courage intensified. On the next day they flung themselves against the remnant of the Nana's army that still tried to bar the way into the city. Vague rumours had reached the men of the dreadful tragedy enacted on

the 15th. They refused to credit them. None but maniacs would murder helpless women and children in the belief that the crime would hinder the advance of their rescuers. So they crushed, tore, beat a path through the suburbs, until the leading company of Highlanders reached the Bibigarh, the House of the Woman.

Malcolm was with them, and he saw a sergeant enter the blood-stained dwelling, while the men lined up in front of the well in an awed silence. The sergeant returned. His brick-red face had paled to an ashen tint. In his hand he carried the long, rich strands of a woman's hair, strands that had been hacked off some unhappy Englishwoman's head by Nana Sahib's butchers.

He removed his bonnet with the solemnity of a man who is in the presence of God and death. Passing down the ranks, he gave a lock of the hair to each soldier.

"One life for every hair before the sun sets," he said quietly. And that was all, but there are old men yet alive in Cawnpore who remember how the Highlanders raged through the streets that evening like the wrath of Heaven.

General Neill, who came later and assumed the rôle of magistrate, showed neither pity nor mercy. Every man who fell into his hands, and who was connected in the slightest degree with the infamy of the well, was hanged on a gallows erected in the compound, but not until he had cleaned with his tongue the allotted square of blood-stained cement that formed the floor of the house.

Cawnpore, on the 17th, was, indeed, "a city of dread-

ful night." The fierce exultation of successful warfare was gone. The streets were empty save for prowling dogs, pigs, and venturesome wild beasts. No sound was heard in the British encampment except the melancholy plaint of the pipes mourning for the dead during the interment of those who had fallen. Even the unconquerable Havelock said to his son, as they and the officers of the staff sat at dinner—

"If the worst comes to the worst, we can but die with our swords in our hands."

Next morning his splendid vitality reasserted itself. He advanced towards Bithoor, and took up a strong position in case Nana Sahib might attempt to recover the city. But that arch-fiend had been deserted by the majority of his followers, and he was babbling of suicide to his fellow-Brahmins.

Meanwhile, Neill brought a few more troops from Allahabad, and Havelock threw the greater portion of his army across the Ganges. Owing to the difficulty of obtaining boats and skilled boatmen this was a slow and dangerous undertaking. It took five days to ferry 900 men to the Oudh side, but Lawrence had said that the Residency could only hold out fourteen days, and, come what might, the effort must be made to relieve him.

On the 20th, while Malcolm was occupied with some details of transport, Chumru came to him. The bearer was no longer "Ali Khan," the swashbuckler, but a white-robed domestic, though no change of attire could rob him of the truculent aspect that was the gift of Nature.

Beside Chumru stood another Mohammedan, an

elderly man, who straightened himself under the sahib's eye, and brought up his right hand in a smart military salute.

"Huzoor," said Chumru, "this is Ungud, Kumpani pinsin (a pensioner of the Company), and he would have speech with the Presence."

"Speak, then, and quickly, for I have occupation," said Malcolm. But he listened carefully enough to Ungud's words, for the man coolly proposed to work his way to Lucknow and carry any message to Lawrence that the General-sahib entrusted to him.

It was a desperate thing to suggest. The absence of native spies from either Cawnpore or Lucknow proved that the rebels killed, and probably tortured, all who attempted to run the gauntlet of their investing lines. Yet Ungud was firm in his offer, so Malcolm brought him to Havelock, and the general at once wrote and gave him a letter to Lawrence, the news of the great Commissioner's death not having reached the relieving force.

Frank seized the opportunity to write a few lines to Winifred. He was charged with the care of Ungud as far as the nearest river ghat, and he scribbled the following as he rode thither :—

"British Field Force,
"Cawnpore, July 20th, 1857.

"MY DEAREST WINIFRED,—If this note is safely delivered to you, you will know that Sir Henry Havelock, at the head of a strong force, is on his way to relieve Lucknow. I am with him, as major on the staff.

"I reached Allahabad on the 4th, thanks wholly to your loving thought in sending Chumru after me, for I was a prisoner in the hands of a fanatical Moulvie when Chumru

came to my assistance. He saved my life there, and his quick-witted devotion was shown in many other instances during a most exciting journey. My thoughts are always with you, dear one, and I offer many a prayer to the Most High that you may retain your health and spirits amid the horrors that surround you. Be confident, dear heart, and bid your uncle tell his comrades of the garrison that we mean to cut our way to your rescue through all opposition.

"The bearer will endeavour to return with a reply to the general. Perhaps you may be able to send a line with him. In any event, I trust he will see you, and that will bring joy to my soul when I hear of it.—Ever your devoted,

"FRANK."

By Havelock's order, a light, swift boat was placed at Ungud's disposal, and Malcolm supplied him with plenty of money for horses and bribes on the road; while, in the event of success, he would be liberally rewarded afterwards.

Now, it chanced that on the 20th, about the very hour Ungud set out on his daring mission, the Moulvie of Fyzabad managed to goad his co-religionists into a determined assault on the Residency.

At ten o'clock in the morning the bombardment suddenly ceased. The garrison sentries noted an unusual gathering of the enemy's forces in the streets and open spaces that confronted the Bailey Guard and the other main posts on the city side.

They gave the alarm, and every man rushed to the walls. Even the sick and wounded left their beds. Men with the fire of fever in their eyes, men with bandaged limbs and scarce able to crawl, asked for muskets and lined up alongside their yet unscathed comrades.

They waited in grim silence, those war-worn soldiers

of the Queen. The signal for a furious struggle was given in dramatic fashion. A mine exploded, a large section of the defending wall crumbled into ruins, a hundred guns belched forth a perfect hail of round shot, sharp-shooters stationed in the neighbouring houses fired their muskets as rapidly as they could lift them from piles of loaded weapons at their command, and, under cover of this fusillade, some 3,000 rebels advanced to the attack.

They came on with magnificent courage. They actually succeeded in planting scaling-ladders across the breach, and their leader, a fierce-looking cavalry rissaldar, leaped into the ditch and stood there, right in front of the Cawnpore Battery, waving a green standard to encourage his followers.

He was shot by a man of the 32nd, and his body formed the lowermost layer of a causeway of corpses that soon choked the ditch. But the concentrated fire of the defenders checked this most audacious of the many assaults delivered during four hours' fighting. At two o'clock the attack slackened and died away. The rebels had lost some hundreds, while the British had only four men killed and twelve wounded.

There was much jubilation among the garrison at this outcome of the long-expected and dreaded attack. It added to their spirit of self-reliance, and it cast down the hopes of the mutineers to a corresponding degree, because their moral inferiority was proved beyond dispute. Like all Asiatics, they had not dared to press on in the face of death. With one whole-hearted rush those 3,000 fighters could have swarmed into the Residency against all the efforts of the few Europeans and natives

who resisted them. But that rush was never made by the assailants as a mass. Not once in the history of the Mutiny did the sepoys adopt the "do or die" method that characterised the British troops in nearly every action of the campaign.

When the moon rose on the night of the 21st, a sharp-eyed sentry saw a man creeping across the broken ground in front of the Bailey Guard. He raised his rifle, but his orders were to challenge anyone who approached thus secretly, lest, perchance, a messenger from some relieving force might be slain by error.

"Who goes there?" he cried.

"A friend," was the answer, but the rest of the stranger's words showed that he was a native.

The sentry was no linguist.

"You *baito*¹ where you are," he commanded, bidding a comrade summon an officer, "or somebody who can talk the lingo."

Within a minute the new-comer was admitted. It was Ungud, who had run the gauntlet of the enemy's pickets, and who now triumphantly produced Havelock's letter to "Larrence-sahib Bahadur." Alas, Henry Lawrence was dead, but Brigadier Inglis, who succeeded him in the command, now learnt that Havelock had defeated Nana Sahib, occupied Cawnpore, and was advancing to the relief of Lucknow.

How the great news buzzed through the Residency! How men grasped each other's hands in glee and exultation, and sought leave to take the joyful tidings to the hospital and the women's quarters!

Mayne aroused Winifred to tell her.

¹ "Stop."

"Perhaps Malcolm was able to get through to Allahabad," he said. "When you come to think of the difficulties in the way of our troops—this man says they have fought three, if not four, pitched battles between Fattehpur and Cawnpore—we have been unreasonable in looking for help so soon."

"Mr Malcolm would surely succeed if it were possible. He understands the native character so well, and is so proficient in their language, that he was the best man who could be chosen for such a task."

And that was all that Winifred would say about "Mr Malcolm," who would have been the most miserable and the most astonished person in India that night had he known how bitter was the girl's heart against him.

Though Winifred was not to blame, for the necklace and the pass offered strong evidence of double-dealing on her lover's part, her unjust suspicions were doomed to receive a severe shock.

In the morning she heard that Captain Fulton wished to see her. She left her quarters by a covered way, and waited outside the Begum Kothee until a soldier found Fulton.

He came, bringing with him a native.

"This is the man who arrived from Cawnpore last night, Miss Mayne," he said. "He has a letter for you, but he refuses to deliver it to anyone but yourself. I fancy," added the gallant engineer officer, with a smile, "that the sender impressed on him the importance of its reaching the right hands."

Winifred caught a glimpse of Frank's handwriting.

Her face grew scarlet. For one delightful instant she forgot the harsh thoughts she had harboured against him. Then the scourge of memory tortured her. Fulton's kindly assumption that Malcolm was her *fiancé* must be dispelled, and she bit her lower lip in vexation at the tell-tale rush of colour that had mantled her cheeks when Ungud discharged his trust and gave her the letter.

"It is from Captain Malcolm," she said coldly. "I suppose he wishes his personal belongings to be safeguarded. I am surprised he did not write to my uncle rather than to me."

Fulton was surprised, but he laughed lightly.

"Everyone to his taste," he said, "but from what little I have seen of Malcolm I should wager that nine out of ten letters addressed to the Mayne family would be intended for you, Miss Winifred. By the way, a word in your ear. General Inglis hopes to persuade our friend here to try his luck on a return journey to-night. Perhaps you may have a note to send on your own account. No one else must know. This is a special favour, conferred because Malcolm himself procured Ungud's services, but we cannot ask the man to act as general postman. Good-bye."

He hurried away. Winifred, after the manner of woman, fingered the unopened letter.

"Kuch joab hai, miss-sahib?" asked Ungud.

"There is no answer yet. I will give you one later."

The girl's Hindustani went far enough to enable her to frame the reply intelligibly. Ungud salaamed and left her, probably contrasting in his own mind the lady's

frigidity with the fervid instructions given him by the officer sahib.

Then Winifred went to her own room, and opened her letter, and her woman's heart gleaned the truth from its candour. Of course, she cried. What girl wouldn't? But she smiled through her tears, and read the nice bits over and over again. Not for twenty necklaces and a whole file of hieroglyphic passes would she doubt Frank any more.

The reference to Chumru puzzled her, and that was a gratifying thing in itself; for if Frank could be mistaken about her share in Chumru's departure from Lucknow, why should not she be wrong in her interpretation of the mysterious presence of the necklace?

When her uncle came she wept again, being hysterical with the sheer joy of watching his face while he perused Frank's note.

A man's bewilderment finds different expression from a woman's. A man trusts his brain, a woman her heart.

"If there is one thing absolutely clear in this letter, it is that Frank knows nothing whatever about the pearls you produced from his turban," said Mr Mayne, with the frown of a judge who is dealing with a knotty point in equity.

"There are—several things—quite clear in it—to me," fluttered Winifred.

"Ah, hum, yes. But I mean that it is ridiculous to suppose he would knowingly leave such a valuable article exposed to the chances and changes of barrack-room life in a siege. Whatever motive he may have

had in concealing the necklace earlier, he would surely have said something about it now, given some hint as to its value, asked you to take care of his baggage, or something of the sort."

"In my heart of hearts I always felt that we were misjudging Frank," said she.

Mayne's eyebrows lifted a trifle, but he passed no comment.

"By the way," he said, "where is the necklace?"

"Here," she said, pulling a box out of a cupboard. The string of pearls was coiled up in the midst of the roll of soiled muslin, and the badge was pinned to one of the folds.

"That is a very unsafe place," said Mayne. "If I were you I would wear it beneath your bodice."

"Would you really?"

"Yes. I can think of no other explanation of the mystery now than that Frank meant to surprise you with it. You may be sure he obtained it honourably, so you will only be meeting his wishes by wearing it. At any rate, it will be safer in your possession than in that cupboard."

"Perhaps you are right," said she. And while she clasped the diamond-studded brooch in front of her white throat she glanced round the room for a mirror.

Her uncle smiled. He was glad that this little cloud had lifted off Winifred's sky. The sufferings and positive dangers of the siege were bad enough already without being added to by a private grief.

He stooped to pick up the turban, and his eye fell on the regimental device of the metal badge.

"This is not an officer's head-dress," he cried. "And Malcolm belongs to the 3rd Cavalry, whereas this badge was worn by a trooper in the 2nd."

Winifred, who was turning her neck and shoulders this way and that to get different angles of light, stopped admiring herself and ran to his side.

"That is the turban Frank wore during our ride from Cawnpore," she whispered breathlessly.

"It may be. But don't you remember that he was bareheaded when we met him in Nana Sahib's garden? I was knocked almost insensible during the fight for the boat, so I am not sure what happened during the next few minutes. Nevertheless, I can recall that prior fact beyond cavil. If it were not for the safe-conduct you found at the same time as the pearls, I would incline strongly to the belief that Frank obtained this turban by accident, and is wholly ignorant of its extraordinary contents."

"I must write at once and tell him how sorry I am that I misjudged him."

"You dear little goose," cried her uncle, amusedly, "Frank will begin to wonder, then, what the judging was about. No. Wait until you meet. Write, by all means, but leave problems for settlement during your first *tête-à-tête*."

So Ungud carried in his turban a loving and sympathetic note, which Winifred, with no small pride, addressed to "Major Frank Malcolm, Headquarters Staff, British Field Force, Cawnpore," and she said inside, among other things, that she hoped this would

prove to be the first letter he received with the inscription of his new rank.

Ungud also took confidential details from the brigadier for Havelock's information, and in three days, being as supple as an eel and cautious as a leopard, he was back again with a reply from the general to the effect that the relieving force would arrive in less than a week.

He brought another missive from Frank, cheery and optimistic in tone, and still blithely oblivious of the existence of such baubles as £20,000 necklaces.

And that was all the news that either the garrison or Winifred received for more than a month, when the intrepid Ungud again entered the lines to bring Havelock's ominous advice: "Do not negotiate, but rather perish sword in hand."

This time there was no letter from Frank, and the alarmed, half-despairing girl could only learn that the major-sahib was not with the column, which had been compelled to fall back on Cawnpore after some heavy fighting in Oudh. Ungud did not think he was dead; but who could tell? There were so many sahibs who fell, for out of his 1,200 Havelock had lost nearly half, and was now eating his heart out in a weary wait for reinforcements that were toiling up the thousand miles of road and river from Calcutta.

So the blackness of disappointed hope fell on the Residency and its inmates. Those few natives who had hitherto proved faithful began to desert in scores. About a third of the European soldiers were dead. Smallpox and cholera added their ravages to

the enemy's unceasing fire and occasional fierce assaults.

Famine, and tainted water, and lack of hospital stores, and every evil device of malign fate that persecutes people in such straits, were there to harass the unhappy defenders.

Officers and men swore that they would shoot their women-folk with their own hands rather than permit them to fall into the rebels' clutches, and, at times, when the siege slackened a little in its continuous cannonade, the devoted community gave way to lethargy and despondency.

But let the enemy muster for an attack, these veteran soldiers faced them with the dogged steadfastness that made them gods among the Asiatic scum. The brigadier, too, never allowed his splendid spirit to flag. Though for three months he had not slept without being fully dressed, though he worked harder than any other man in the garrison, he was the life and soul of every outpost that he visited during the day or night.

Captain Fulton was another human dynamo in their midst. Finding plenty of miners among the Cornishmen of the 32nd, he sank a countermine for each mine burrowed by the enemy. His favourite amusement was to sit alone for hours in a shaft, wait patiently until the rebels bored a way up to him, and then shoot the foremost workers.

And in such fashion the siege went on, with houses collapsing because they were so riddled with cannonballs that the walls gave way, and ever-nearing sapping of the fortifications, and intolerable breaks in the

monsoon, when the heat became so overpowering that even the natives yielded to the strain—and the days passed, and the weeks, and the months, until, on September 16th, Ungud, tempted by a bribe of five thousand rupees, crept away for the last time with despatches for Havelock.

CHAPTER XIV

WHY MALCOLM DID NOT WRITE

It was the saddest hour in Havelock's life when he decided that his Invincibles must retreat. Yet, after another week's fighting, that course was forced on him.

On July 25th he plunged fearlessly into Oudh, leaving a wide and rapid river in his rear, with other rivers, canals, and fortified towns and villages in front, on three sides swarms of determined enemies gathered again under the standards of Nana Sahib and the Oudh Taluqdars, and everywhere a hostile if not actually mutinous peasantry.

With his usual daring, trusting to the unsurpassed *elan* of his troops, he fought battles at Onao and Busseerutgunge. Then, when the thunder of the fighting was faintly heard by listeners in the Residency, Havelock took thought, and regretted that he had ventured to leave Cawnpore.

His force numbered about half the men who marched out of Allahabad on the 7th. Cholera had broken out, stores were scanty, there was not a single litter for another wounded man, and, worst of all, ammunition was failing. To advance further meant the total destruction of his little army, the sure and instant fall of the Residency, and the disappearance of the British flag from an enormous territory.

Yet he hesitated before he gave the final order. He fell back a couple of marches, and wrote to Neill on the 31st, that he could "do nothing for the relief of Lucknow" until he received a reinforcement of a thousand men and a new battery.

Neill, who was holding Cawnpore with three hundred rifles, returned the most amazing reply that ever a subordinate officer addressed to his chief.

"The natives don't believe you have won any real victories," he wrote, in effect. "Your retreat has destroyed the prestige of England. While you are waiting for reinforcements that cannot arrive, Lucknow will be lost. You must advance again, and not halt until you have rescued the garrison. Then return here sharp, as there is much to be done between this and Agra, and Delhi."

Neill's zeal outran his discretion. Havelock told him in plain language his opinion of this curious epistle.

"Your letter is the most extraordinary I have ever perused," he said. . . . "Consideration of the obstruction which would arise in this public service alone prevents me from placing you under immediate arrest. You now stand warned. Attempt no further dictation."

Yet Neill's advice rankled, and there were men on Havelock's staff who agreed with the outspoken Irishman. Neill, however, coolly bottled his wrath, and sent on a company of the 84th and three guns.

They brought despatches from Sir Patrick Grant, Commander-in-Chief at Calcutta, telling Havelock that the troops sent from the capital had been turned aside to deal with mutineers in Behar.

The gallant Crimean veteran, therefore, hardened his heart, set out once more for Lucknow, and fought another most successful battle at Busseerutgunge. There could be no questioning either the victory or its cost. Another such success, and his column would not number a half-battalion.

That night he watched the weary soldiers digging graves for their fallen comrades, and, while his brain was torn with conflicting problems, a spy brought news that the powerful Gwalior Contingent was marching to seize Cawnpore. He hesitated no longer. As a general he had no right to be swayed by emotion. He must protect Cawnpore as a base, and trust to the fortune of war that Lucknow might keep the flag flying.

Malcolm was with him when he formed this resolution. Outwardly cold, Sir Henry seemed to his youthful observer, who now knew him better, to resemble a volcano coated with ice.

"Major," he said, "the column will retreat at day-break. But I will get my other aides to make arrangements. Are you quite recovered from your wound? Are you capable of undergoing somewhat severe exertion, I mean?"

Frank answered modestly that he thought he had never been better in health or strength, though he wondered inwardly what sort of exertion could be more "severe" than his experiences of the preceding three weeks.

But Havelock knew what he was talking about, as shall be seen.

"I want you to make the best of your way to Delhi," he said in his unbending manner. "I leave details to you,

except that I would like you to start to-night if possible. Of course, any kind of escort that is available would be fatal to your success; but, if I remember his record rightly, that servant of yours may be useful. I do not propose to give you any despatches. If you get through, tell the Commander-in-Chief in the Punjab exactly how we are situated here. Tell him Lucknow will not be relieved for nearly two months, but that I will hold Cawnpore till the last man falls. I hope and trust you may be spared to make the journey in safety. If you are, you will receive a gratuity and a step in rank. Good-bye!"

He held out his hand, and his calm eyes kindled for a moment. Then Frank found himself walking to his tent and reviewing all that this meant to Winifred and himself. He was none the less a brave man if his lips trembled somewhat, and there came a tightening of the throat that suspiciously resembled a sob.

Two months! Could a delicate girl live so long in another such Inferno at Lucknow as he had seen in Wheeler's abandoned entrenchment at Cawnpore?

"God help us both!" he murmured bitterly, passing a hand involuntarily over his misty eyes. With the action he brushed away doubt and fears. He was a soldier again, one to whom hearing and obedience were identical.

"Chumru," he said, when he found his domestic scratching mud off a coat with his nails for lack of a clothes-brush, "we set out for Delhi to-night, you and I."

"All right, sahib," was the unexpected parry to this astounding thrust, and Chumru kept on with his task.

"It is a true thing," said Malcolm, who knew full well that the Mohammedan understood the extraordinary difficulty of such a mission. "It is the general-sahib's order, and he wishes you to go with me. Will you come?"

"Huzoor, have you ever gone anywhere without me since you came to my hut that night when I was stricken with smallpox—"

"Only once, you rascal, and then you came after me to my great good fortune. Very well, then; that is settled. Stop raising dust, and listen. We ride to-night. Let us discuss the manner of our travelling, for 'tis a long road, and full of mischief."

Chumru laid aside the garment, and tickled his wiry hair underneath his turban.

"By the Kaaba," he growled, "such roads lead to Jahannum more easily than to Delhi. Do you go to the Princess Roshinara, sahib?"

Malcolm's overwrought feelings found vent in a hearty laugh.

"What fiend tempted thee to think of her, owl?" he cried.

"Nay, sahib, no fiend other than a woman. What else would bring your honour to Delhi? Is there not occupation here in plenty?"

"I tell thee, image, that the general-sahib hath ordered it. And I am making for the British camp on the Ridge, not for the city."

Chumru dismissed the point. He was a fatalist, and he probably reserved his opinion. Malcolm had beguiled the long night after they left Rai Bareilly with the story of his strange meetings with the King's daughter.

To the Eastern mind there was Kismet in such happenings.

"I would you had not lost Bahadur Shah's pass, huzoor," he said. "That would be worth a bagful of gold mohurs on the north road now. But as matters stand, we must fall back on walnut juice. You have blue eyes and fair hair, alack, yet must we—"

"What! Wouldst thou make me a brother of thine?" demanded Malcolm, understanding that the walnut juice was intended to darken his skin.

"There is no other way, huzoor. This is no ride of a night. We shall be seven days, let us go at the best, and meeting budmashes at every mile. If you did not talk Urdu like one of us, sahib, I should bid you die here in peace rather than fall in the first village. Still, we may have luck, and you can bandage your hair and forehead, and swear that those cursed Feringhis nearly cut your scalp off. But you must be rubbed all over, sahib, until you are the colour of brown leather, for we can have no patches of white skin showing where, perchance, your garments are rent."

Malcolm saw the wisdom of the suggestion, and fell in with it. When Chumru went to compound walnut juice in the nearest bazaar, he, in pursuance of the plan they had concocted together, got a native writer to compile a letter which purported to emanate from Nana Sahib, and was addressed to Bahadur Shah. It was a very convincing document. Malcolm contributed a garbled history of recent events, and one of the Brahmin's seals, which came into Havelock's possession when Cawnpore was occupied, lent verisimilitude to the script.

Then the Englishman covered himself with an oily

compound that Chumru assured him would darken his skin effectually before morning, though the present effect was more obvious to the nose than to the eye. Chumru donned his rissaldar Brahmin's uniform, and Malcolm secured a similar outfit from a native officer on the staff. Well armed and well mounted, the pair crossed the Ganges north of Bithoor, gained the Grand Trunk Road, and were far from the British column when they drew rein for their first halt of more than an hour's duration.

They had adventures galore on the road to Delhi, but Chumru's repertory of oaths anent the Nazarenes, and Malcolm's dignified hauteur as a messenger of the man who ranked higher in the native world than the octogenarian king, carried them through without grave risk. True, they had a close shave or two.

Once, a suspicious sepoy who knew every native officer in the 7th Cavalry, to which corps "Rissaldar Ali Khan" was supposed to belong, had to be quietly choked to death within earshot of a score of his own comrades who were marching to the Mogul capital. On another occasion, a Moulvie, or Mohammedan priest, was nearly the cause of their undoing. Malcolm was not sufficiently expert in the ritual of the Reka, and this shortcoming aroused the devotee's ire, but he was calmed by Chumru's assurance that his excellent friend, Laiq Ahmed, was still suffering from the wounds inflicted by the condemned Giaours, and the storm blew over.

These incidents simply served to enliven a tedious journey. Its main features were climatic discomfort and positive starvation. Rain storms, hot winds, sweltering intervals of intolerable heat—these were vagaries of nature and might be endured. But the

absence of food was a more serious matter. The passage to and fro of rebel detachments had converted the Grand Trunk Road into a wilderness. The sepoys paid for nothing, and looted Mohammedans and Hindus alike. After two months of constant pilfering, the unhappy ryots had little left. For the most part they deserted their hovels, gathered such few valuables as had escaped the human locusts who devoured their substance, and either retreated to remote villages or boldly sought a living in some other province.

Indeed, it may be said in all candour that the Mutiny caused far more misery to the great mass of the people than to the foreign rulers against whom it was supposed to be directed. The sufferings of the English residents in India were terrible, and the treatment meted out to them was unspeakably vile, but for one English life sacrificed during the country's red year there were five hundred natives killed by the very men who professed to defend their interests.

Malcolm and Chumru were given proof in plenty of this fact as they rode along. Generations of local feuds had taught the villagers to construct their rude shanties in such wise that any place of fairly large population formed a strong fort. Where the ryots were collected in sufficient numbers to render such a proceeding possible, they armed themselves not only against the British but against all the world.

Many times the travellers were fired at by men who took them for sepoys, and they often found active hostilities in progress between a party of desperate rebels who wanted food and a horde of sturdy villagers who refused to treat with men in any sort of uniform.

Still, they managed to live. In the fields they found ripening grain and an abundance of that small millet or pulse-pea, known as gram, which is the staple food of horses in India. Occasionally, Malcolm shot a peacock, but shooting birds with a revolver is a difficult sport and wasteful of ammunition. Where hares were plentiful, Chumru seldom failed to snare one during the night. These were feast days. At other times they chewed millet, and were thankful for small mercies.

The journey occupied nearly twice the time of their original estimate. Nejdi, good horse as he was, wanted a rest; Chumru's steed was liable to break down any hour; and it was a sheer impossibility to obtain a remount in that wasted tract.

All things considered, it was a wonderful achievement when, on the evening of the eleventh day, they began their last march.

They planned matters so that the Jumna lay between them and their goal. When they left the tope of trees in which they had slept away the hot hours, their ostensible aim was the bridge of boats which carried the Meerut Road across the river into the imperial city.

That was their story if they fell in with company. In reality they meant to leave the dangerous locality with the best speed their horses were capable of. There could be no doubt that Delhi was the stronghold of the mutineers. Even discounting by ninety per cent. the grandiloquent stories they heard, it was evident that the British still held the Ridge, but were rather besieged than besiegers.

For the rest, the natives were assured that the foreign

rule had passed for ever. Their version of the position was that "great fighting took place daily, and the Nazarenes were being slaughtered in hundreds."

The one statement nullified the other. Malcolm reasoned, correctly as it happened, that the British force was able to hold its own, but not strong enough to take the city, that the Punjab was quiet, and that the general in command on the Ridge was biding his time until reinforcements arrived. Therefore, if Chumru and he could strike the left bank of the Jumna a few miles above Delhi, there should be no difficulty in crossing the stream and reaching the British camp.

For once, a well-laid scheme did not reveal unforeseen pitfalls. He had the good fortune to fall in with a corps of irregular horse scouting for a half-expected flank attack by the rebels in the grey dawn of the morning of August 11th. Chumru and he were nearly shot by mistake, but that is ever the risk of those who wear an enemy's uniform, and, by this time, John Company's livery was quite discredited in the land which he, in his corporate capacity, had opened up to Europeans.

Moreover, between dirt and walnut stain, Malcolm was like an animated bronze statue, and it was good to see the incredulous expression on a brother officer's face when he rode up with the cheery cry—

"By Jove, old fellow, I am glad to see you. I am Malcolm, of the 3rd Cavalry, and I have brought news from General Havelock."

The leader of the scouting party, a stalwart subaltern

of dragoons, thought that it was a piece of impudence on the part of this "dark" stranger to address him so familiarly.

"I happen to be acquainted with Mr Malcolm—" he began.

"Not so well as I know him, Saumarez," said Frank, laughing. He had not counted on his disguise being so complete. But the laugh proved his identity, for there is more distinctive character in a man's mirth than in any other inflection of the voice.

Saumarez testified to an amazed recognition in the approved manner of a dragoon.

"Either you are Malcolm or I am bewitched," he cried. Then he looked at Chumru.

"This gentleman, no doubt, is at least a brigadier," he went on. "But, joking apart, have you really ridden from Allahabad?"

The question showed the lack of information of events farther south that obtained in the Punjab. By this time the sepoys had torn down the telegraph-posts and cut the wires in all directions. Even between Cawnpore and Calcutta, whenever they crossed the Grand Trunk Road, they destroyed the telegraph. As one of them said, looking up at a damaged pole which was about to serve as his gallows—

"Ah, you are able to hang me now because that cursed wire strangled all of us in our sleep."

His metaphor was correct enough. There is no telling what might have been the course of history in India if the sepoys had stopped telegraphic communication from the North to Calcutta early in May.

Malcolm gave Saumarez a summary of affairs in the

North-West Provinces as they rode on ahead of the troop.

"And now," he said, "how do matters stand here?"

"You have used the right word," said the other. "Stand! That is just what we are doing. We've had three Commanders-in-Chief, and each one is more timid than his predecessor. Thank goodness, Nicholson arrived four days ago. Things will begin to move now."

"Is that the Peshawur Nicholson?" asked Frank, remembering that Hodson had spoken of a man of that name, a man who would "horsewhip into the saddle" a general who feared to assume responsibility.

"Yes. Haven't you seen him? By gad, he's a wonder. A giant of a fellow, with an eye like a hawk, and a big black beard that seems, somehow, to suggest a blacksmith. He turned up at our mess on the first evening he was in camp. Everybody was laughing and joking as usual, and he never said a word. I didn't understand it at the time, but I noticed that Nicholson just glowered at each man who told a funny story, and, by degrees, we were all sitting like mutes at a funeral. Then he said, in a deep voice that made us jump—'When some of you gentlemen can spare me a moment, I shall be glad to hear what you have been doing here during the last ten weeks.'

"There was no sneer in his words. We have had fighting enough, Heaven knows, but we felt that by 'doing' he meant 'attacking,' not 'defending.' Sure as death, he will create a stir. Indeed, the leaven is working already. He sent me out here this morning, as he has gone to meet the Movable Column from Lahore, and there was a rumour of a sortie from Delhi to cut it off."

Malcolm, fresh from association with Havelock, realised that a grave and serious-minded soldier could ill brook the jests and idle talk that dominated the average military mess of the period.

"Nicholson sounds like the right man in the right place," he commented.

The dragoon vouched for it emphatically.

"He has put an end to pony-racing and quoits," said he, "and there is to be no more fighting in our shirt-sleeves. Bear in mind, we have had a deuce of a time. I've been in twenty-one fights myself, and that is not all. The sepoys usually swarm out hell-for-leather, and we rush to meet them. There is a scrimmage for an hour or so, we shove 'em back, Hodson gets in a bit of sabre-work, we pick up the wounded, tell off a burial party, and start a cricket-match or a gymkhana. Of course, the fighting is stiff while it lasts, and my regiment has lost its two best bowlers, a really sound bat, and a crack rider in the pony heats. Still, if we don't lose any ground we gain none, and I can't help agreeing with Nicholson that war isn't a picnic."

Frank managed not to smile at the naïveté of his companion. Though Saumarez was about his own age, he felt that their difference in rank was not nearly so great as the divergence in their conceptions of the magnitude of the task before Britain in India. Nevertheless, Saumarez saw that Nicholson was a force, and that was something.

"Is the Hodson you mention the same man who rode from Kurnaul to Meerut before the affair of Ghazi-ud-din Nuggur?" he asked.

"Yes, same chap. A regular firebrand, and no

mistake. He has gathered a crowd of dare-devils known as Hodson's Horse, and they go into action with a dash that I thought was only to be found in regular cavalry. But here we are at our ghat. That is a weedy-looking arab you are riding—plenty of bone, though. Will he go aboard a budgerow without any fuss?"

"Oh, yes. He will do most things," was the quiet reply.

Malcolm dismounted and fondled Nejdi's black muzzle. How little the light-hearted dragoon guessed what those two had endured together! Nejdi as a weed was a new *rôle*. For an instant, Frank thought of making a match with his friend's best charger after Nejdi had had a week's rest.

It was altogether a changed audience that Havelock's messenger secured that evening when Nicholson rode to the Ridge with the troops sent from the North by Sir John Lawrence, Edwardes, and Montgomery, while the generosity of Bartle Frere, in sending from Scinde regiments he could ill spare, should be mentioned in the same breath.

Saumarez's "giant of a fellow" was there, and Archdale Wilson, the Commander-in-Chief, and Neville Chamberlain, and Baird-Smith, and Hervey Greathed. Inspired by the presence of such men, Malcolm entered into a full account of occurrences at Lucknow, Cawnpore, and elsewhere during the preceding month. His hearers were aware of Henry Lawrence's death and of the beginning of the siege of Lucknow. They had heard of Massacre Ghat, the Well, and Havelock's advance, but they were dependent on native rumour and an occasional spy for their information, and Frank's

epic narrative was the first complete and true history that had been given them.

He was seldom interrupted. Occasionally, when he was tempted to slur over some of the dangers he had overcome personally, a question from one or other of the five would force him to be more explicit.

Naturally, he spoke freely of the magnificent exploits of Havelock's column, and he saw Nicholson ticking off each engagement, each tremendous march, each fine display of strategic genius on the part of the general, with an approving nod and shake of his great beard.

"You have done well, young man," said General Wilson, when Frank's long recital came to an end. "What rank did you hold on General Havelock's staff?"

That of major, sir."

"You are confirmed in the same rank here. I have no doubt your services will be further recognised at the close of the campaign."

"If Havelock had the second thousand men he asked for, he would now be marching here," growled Nicholson.

No one spoke for a little while. The under meaning of the giant's words was plain. Havelock had moved while they stood still. The criticism was a trifle unjust, perhaps, but men with Napoleonic ideas are impatient of the limitations that afflict their less powerful brethren. If India were governed exclusively by Nicholsons, Lawrences, Havelocks, Hodsons, and Neills, there would never have been a Mutiny. It was Britain's rare good fortune that they existed at all, and came to the front when the fiery breath of war had

scorched and shrivelled the nonentities who held power and place at the outbreak of hostilities.

Then someone passed a remark on Frank's appearance. He was bareheaded. The fair hair and blue eyes that had perplexed Chumru looked strangely out of keeping with his brown skin.

"How in the world did you manage to escape detection during your ride north?" he was asked.

He explained Chumru's device, and they laughed. Like Havelock, Baird-Smith thought the Mohammedan would make a good soldier.

"With all his pluck, sir, he is absolutely afraid of using a pistol," said Frank. "He was offered the highest rank as a native officer, but he refused it."

"Then, by gad, we must make him a zamindar. Tell him I said so, and that we all agree on that point."

When Frank gave the message to Chumru it was received with a demoniac grin.

"By the Holy Kaaba," came the gleeful cry, "I told the Moulvie of Fyzabad that I was in the way of earning a jaghir, and behold, it is promised to me!"

Next day Malcolm, somewhat lighter in tint after a hot bath, made himself acquainted with the camp. Seldom has war brought together such a motley assemblage of races as gathered on the Ridge during the siege of Delhi. The far-off isles of the sea were represented by men from every shire, and Britain's mixed heritage in the East sent a bewildering variety of types.

Small, compactly-built Goorkhas hobnobbed with stalwart Highlanders; lively Irishmen made friends of gaunt, saturnine Pathans; bearded Sikhs extended grave courtesies to pert-nosed Cockneys; "gallant little

Wales" might be seen tending the needs of wounded Mohammedans from the Punjab. The language bar proved no obstacle to the men of the rank and file.

A British private would sit and smoke in solemn and friendly silence with a hook-nosed Afghan, and the two would rise cheerfully after an hour passed in that fashion with nothing in common between them save the memory of some deadly thrust averted when they fought one day in the hollow below Hindu Rao's house, or a draught of water tendered when one or other lay gasping and almost done to death in a struggle for the village of Subsee Munde.

The British soldier, who has fought and bled in so many lands, showed his remarkable adaptability to circumstances by the way in which he made himself at home on the reverse slope of the Ridge. A compact town had sprung up there, with its orderly lines of huts and tents, its long rows of picketed horses, commissariat bullocks and elephants, its churches, hospitals, playgrounds, race-course, and cemetery.

Malcolm took in the general scheme of things while he walked along the Ridge towards the most advanced picket at Hindu Rao's house. On the left front lay Delhi, beautiful as a dream in the brilliant sunshine. The intervening valley was scarred and riven with water-courses, strewn with rocks, covered with ruined mosques, temples, tombs, and houses, and smothered in an overgrowth of trees, shrubs, and long grasses.

Roads were few, but tortuous paths ran everywhere, and it was easy to see how the rebels could steal out unobserved during the night and creep close up to the

pickets before they revealed their whereabouts by a burst of musketry. Happily, they never learnt to reserve their fire. Every man would blaze away at the first alarm, and then, of course, in those days of muzzle-loaders, the more resolute British troops could get to close quarters without serious loss. Still the men who held the Ridge had many casualties, and, until Nicholson came, the rebel artillery was infinitely more powerful than the British. Behind his Movable Column, however, marched a strong siege-train. When that arrived, the gunners could make their presence felt. Thus far, not one of the enemy's guns had been dismounted.

Frank had ocular proof of their strength in this arm before he reached Hindu Rao's house. The Guides, picturesque in their loose, grey-coloured shirts and big turbans, sent one of their cavalry squadrons over the Ridge on some errand. They moved at a sharp canter, but the Delhi gunners had got the range and were ready, and half a dozen eighteen-pound balls crashed into the trees and rocks almost in the exact line of advance. A couple of guns on the British right took up the challenge, and the duel went on long after the Guides were swallowed up in the green depths of the valley.

At last, Malcolm stood in the shelter-trench of the picket and gazed at the city which was the hub of the Mutiny. Beyond the high, red-brick walls he saw the graceful domes and minarets of the Jumna Musjid, while to the left towered the frowning battlements of the King's palace. To the left, again, and nearer, was the small dome of St James's Church, with its lead roof

riddled then, as it remains to this day, with the bullets fired by the rebels in the effort to dislodge the ball and cross that surmounted it. For the rest, his eyes wandered over a noble array of mosques and temples, flat-roofed houses of nobles of the Court and residences of the wealthy merchants who dwelt in the imperial city.

The far-flung panorama behind the walls had a curiously peaceful aspect. Even the puffs of white smoke from the guns, curling upwards like tiny clouds in the lazy air, brought no tremors until a heavy shot hurtled overhead or struck a resounding blow at the already ruined walls of the big house near the post.

The 61st were on picket that day, and one of the men, speaking with a strong Gloucestershire accent, said to Malcolm—

“Well, zur, they zay we’ll be a-lootin’ there zoon.”

“I hope so,” was the reply, but the phrase set him a-thinking.

Within that shining palace most probably was a woman to whom he owed his life. In another palace, many a hundred miles away, was another woman for whom he would willingly risk that life, if only he could save her from the fate that the private of the 61st was gloating over in anticipation.

What a mad jumble of opposites was this useless and horrible war! At any rate, why could not women be kept out of it, and let men adjust their quarrel with the stern arbitrament of sword and gun!

Then he recalled Chumru’s words anent the Princess Roshinara, and the fancy seized him that if he were

destined to enter Delhi with the besiegers he would surely strive to repay the service she had rendered Winifred and Mayne and himself at Bithoor.

That is the way man proposes, and that is why the gods smile when they dispose of man's affairs.

CHAPTER XV

AT THE KING'S COURT

WITHOUT guns to breach the walls, even the heroic Nicholson was powerless against a strongly fortified city.

The siege-train was toiling¹ slowly across the Punjab, but the setting in of the monsoon rendered the transit of heavy cannon a laborious task.

On the 24th of August an officer rode in from the town of Baghput, twenty-five miles to the north, to report that the train was parked there for the night.

"What sort of escort accompanies it?" asked Nicholson, when the news reached him.

"Almost exclusively natives, and few in numbers at that," he was told.

An hour later a native spy from Delhi came to the camp.

"The mutineers are mustering for a big march," he said. "They are providing guns, litters, and commissariat camels, and the story goes that they mean to fight the Feringhis at Bahadurgarh."

The place named was a large village, ten miles north-west of the Ridge, and Nicholson guessed instantly that the sepoys had planned the daring coup of cutting off the siege-train. With him, to hear was to act. He formed a column of two thousand men and a battery of field artillery, and left the camp at dawn on the 25th.

If a forced march could accomplish it, he meant not only to frustrate the enemy's design, but inflict a serious defeat on them.

Malcolm went with him, and never had he taken part in a harder day's work. The road was a bullock track, a swamp of mud amid the larger swamp of the ploughed land and jungle. Horses and men floundered through it as best they might. The guns often sank almost to the trunnions ; many a time the infantry had to help elephants and bullocks to haul them out.

In seven hours the column only marched nine miles, and then came the disheartening news that the spy's information was wrong. The rebels had, indeed, sent out a strong force, but they were at Nujufgarh, miles away to the right.

Officers and men ate a slight meal, growled a bit, and swung off in the new direction. At four o'clock in the afternoon, they found the sepoy army drawn up behind a canal, with its right protected by another canal, and the centre and left posted in fortified villages. Evidently, too, a stout serai, or inn, a square building surrounding a quadrangle set apart for the lodgment of camels and merchandise, was regarded as a stronghold. Here were placed six guns, and the walls were loopholed for musketry.

In a word, had the mutineers been equal in courage and *morale* to the British troops, the resultant attack must have ended in disastrous failure.

But Nicholson was a leader who took the measure of his adversaries. Above all, he did not shirk a battle because it was risky.

The 61st made a flank march, forded the branch

canal under fire, and were ordered to lie down. Nicholson rode up to them, a commanding figure on a seventeen-hands English hunter.

"Now, 61st," he said, "I want you to take that serai and the guns. You all know what Sir Colin Campbell told you at Chillianwallah, and you have heard that he said the same thing at the battle of the Alma. 'Hold your fire until you see the whites of their eyes,' he said, 'and then, my boys, we will make short work of it.' Come on! Let us follow his advice here!"

Swinging his horse around, he rode straight at serai and battery. Grape-shot and bullets sang the death-song of many a brave fellow, but Nicholson was untouched. The 61st leaped to their feet with a yell, rushed after him, and did not fire a shot until they were within twenty yards of the enemy. A volley and the bayonet did the rest. They captured the guns, carried the serai, and pelted the flying rebels with their own artillery. The 1st Punjabis had a stiff fight before they killed every man in the village of Nujufgarh on the left, but the battle was won, practically in defiance of every tenet of military tactics, when the 61st forced their way into the serai.

Utterly exhausted, the soldiers slept on the soddened ground. That night, smoking a cigar with his staff, Nicholson commented on the skill shown in the enemy's disposition.

"I asked a wounded havildar who it was that led the column, and he told me the commander was a new arrival, a subadar of the 8th Irregular Cavalry, named Akhab Khan, he said."

Malcolm started. Akhab Khan was the young sowar

whose life he had spared at Cawnpore when Winifred and her uncle and himself were escaping from Bithoor.

"I knew him well, sir," he could not help saying. "He was not a subadar, but a lance-corporal. He was one of a small escort that accompanied me from Agra to the south, but he is a smart soldier, and not at all of the cut-throat type."

Nicholson looked at him fixedly. He seemed to be considering some point suggested by Malcolm's words.

"If men like him are obtaining commands in Delhi they will prove awkward," was his brief comment, and Frank did not realise what his chief was revolving in his mind until, three days later, the brigadier asked him to don his disguise again, ride to the southward, and endeavour to fall in with a batch of mutineers on the way to Delhi. Then he could enter the city, note the dispositions for the defence, and escape by joining an attacking party during one of the many affrays on the Ridge.

"You will be rendering a national service by your deed," said Nicholson, gazing into Frank's troubled eyes with that magnetic power that bent all men to his will. "I know it is a distasteful business, but you are able to carry it through, and five hours of your observation will be worth five weeks of native reports. Will you do it?"

"Yes, sir," said Malcolm, choking back the protest on his lips. He could not trust himself to say more. He refused even to allow his thoughts to dwell on such a repellent subject. A spy! What soldier likes the office? It stifles ambition. It robs war of its glamour. It may

call for a display of the utmost bravery—that calm courage of facing an ignoble death alone, unheeded, forgotten, which is the finest test of chivalry, but it can never commend itself to a high-spirited youth.

Frank had already won distinction in the field ; it was hard to be chosen now for such a doubtful enterprise.

His worst hour came when he sought Chumru's aid in the matter of walnut-juice.

"What is toward, sahib?" asked the Mohammedan. "Have we not seen enough of India that we must set forth once more?"

"This time I go alone," said Frank, sadly. "Perchance I shall not be long absent. You will remain here in charge of my baggage, and of certain letters which I shall give you."

"Why am I cast aside, sahib?"

"Nay, say not so. 'Tis a matter that I must deal with myself, and not of my own wish, Chumru. I obey the general-sahib's orders."

"Jan Nikkelsen-sahib Bahadur?"

"Yes. I would refuse any other. But haste thee, for time presses."

Chumru went off. He returned in half an hour, to find his master sealing a letter addressed to "Miss Winifred Mayne, to be forwarded, if possible, with the Lucknow Relief Force."

There were others, to relatives in England, and Frank tied them in a small packet.

"If I do not come back within a week—" he began.

"Nay, sahib, give not instructions to me in the matter. I go with you."

"It is impossible."

"Huzoor, it is the order of Jan Nikkelsen-sahib Bahadur. He says I will be useful, and he hath promised me another jaghir."

The Mohammedan's statement was true enough. He had waylaid Nicholson, and obtained permission to accompany his master. Like a faithful dog, he was not to be shaken off, and, in his heart of hearts, Malcolm was glad of it.

Their preparations were made with the utmost secrecy. The same men who sold Bahadur Shah's cause to the British were also the professed spies of the rebels. They were utterly unreliable, yet their tale-bearing in Delhi might bring instant disaster to Malcolm and his native comrade.

Nejdi was in good condition again after the tremendous exertions undergone since he carried his master from Lucknow. Malcolm was in two minds whether to take him or not, but the chance that his life might depend on a reliable horse, and, perhaps, a touch of the gambler's belief in luck, swayed his judgment, and Nejdi was saddled.

Chumru rode a spare charger which Malcolm had purchased at the sale of a dead officer's effects. Fully equipped in their character as rebel non-commissioned officers, the two rode forth, crossing the Jumna, reached the Meerut Road unchallenged, and turned their horses' heads towards the bridge of boats that debouched beneath the walls of the King's palace.

Provided they met some stragglers on the road, they meant to enter the city with the dawn. By skilful expenditure of money on Malcolm's part, and the exercise of Chumru's peculiar inventiveness in maintain-

ing a flow of lurid language, they counted on keeping their new-found comrades in tow while they made the tour of the city. The curiosity of strangers would be quite natural, and Malcolm hoped they might be able to slip out again with some expedition planned for the night or the next morning.

Of course, having undertaken an unpleasant duty, he intended to carry it through. If he did not learn the nature and extent of the enemy's batteries, the general dispositions for the defence, and the state of feeling among the different sections that composed the rebel garrison, he must perforce remain longer. But that was in the lap of fate. At present, he could only plan and contrive to the best of his ability.

Fortune favoured the adventurers at first. They encountered a score of ruffians who had cut themselves adrift from the Gwalior Contingent. Among these strangers Chumru was quickly a hero. He beguiled the way with tales of derring-do in Oudh and the Doab, and discussed the future of all unbelievers with an amazing gusto.

Malcolm, whose head was shrouded in a gigantic and blood-stained turban, listened with interest to his servant's account of the actions outside Cawnpore and on the road to Lucknow. It was excellent fooling to hear Chumru detailing the wholesale slaughter of the Nazarenes, while the victors, always the sepoys, found it advisable to fall back on a strategic position many miles in the rear after each desperate encounter.

In this hail-fellow-well-met manner the party crossed the bridge, were interrogated by a guard at the Water Gate, and admitted to the fortress. It chanced that a

first-rate feud was in progress, and the officer whose duty it was to question new arrivals was taking part in it.

Money was short in the royal treasury. Many thousands of sepoy had neither been paid nor fed; there was a quarrel between Mohammedans and Hindus because the former insisted on slaughtering cattle; and the more respectable citizens were clamouring for protection from the rapacity, insolence, and lust of the swaggering soldiers.

That very day matters had reached a climax. Malcolm found a brawling mob in front of the Lahore Gate of the palace. He caught Chumru's eye, and the latter appealed to a sepoy for information as to the cause of the racket.

"The King of Kings hath a quarrel with his son, Mirza Moghul, who is not over-pleased with the recent division of the command," was the answer.

"What, then? Is there more than one chief?"

"To be sure. Are not Bukht Khan and Akhab Khan in charge of brigades? Where hast thou been, brother, that these things are not known to thee?"

"Be patient with me, I pray thee, friend. I and twenty more whom thou seest here have ridden in within the hour. We come to join the Jihad, and we are grieved to find a dispute toward when we expected to be led against the infidels."

The sepoy laughed scornfully.

"You will see as many fights here as outside the walls," he muttered, and moved off, for men were beginning to guard their tongues in Imperial Delhi.

A rowdy gang of full five hundred armed mutineers marched up and hustled the mob right and left as they

forced a way to the gate. Their words and attitude betokened trouble. The opportunity was too good to be lost. Malcolm dismounted, gave the reins to Chumru, and told him to wait his return under some trees somewhat removed from the road, for Akhab Khan had sharp eyes, and the Mohammedan's grotesque face was well known to him. Chumru made a fearsome grimace, but Malcolm's order was peremptory. Summoning a fruit-seller, the bearer led the Gwalior men to the rendezvous named, and distributed mangoes amongst them.

Frank joined the ruck of the demonstrators, and passed through the portals of the magnificent gate. A long, high-roofed arcade, spacious as the nave of a cathedral, with low marble platforms for merchants on each side, gave access to a quadrangle. In the centre stood a fountain, and round about were grassy lawns and beds of flowers.

The sepoys tramped on, heedless of the destruction they caused in the garden. They passed through the noble Nakar Khana or music-room, and entered another and larger square, at the further end of which stood the Diwan-i-'Am, or Hall of Public Audience.

Not even in Agra, and certainly not in gaudy Lucknow, had Malcolm seen any structure of such striking architectural effect. The elegant roof was supported on three rows of red sandstone pillars adorned with chaste gilding and stucco-work. Open on three sides, the audience chamber was backed by a wall of white marble, from which a staircase led to a throne raised about ten feet from the ground and covered with a rarely beautiful marble canopy borne on four small pillars.

The throne was empty, but an attendant appeared

through the door at the foot of the stairs, and announced that the Light of the World would receive his faithful soldiers in a few minutes.

The impatient warriors snorted their disapproval. They did not like to be kept waiting, but carried their resentment no further; and Malcolm, with alert eyes and ears, moved about among them, as by that means he hoped to avoid attracting attention.

Even in that moment of deadly peril, he could not help admiring the exquisite skill with which the great marble wall was decorated with mosaics and paintings of the fauna and flora of India. The mosaics were wholly composed of precious stones, and the paintings were executed in rich tints that told of a master hand. There was nothing bizarre or crude in their conception. They might have adorned some Athenian temple in the heyday of Greece, and were wholly free from the stiff drawing and flamboyant colouring usually seen in the East.

He did not then know that a renegade Venetian artist, Austin de Bordeaux, had carried out this work for Shah Jehan, that great patron of the arts, and, in any event, his appreciation of their excellence was spasmodic, for the broken words he heard from the excited soldiery warned him that a crisis was imminent in the fortunes of Delhi.

"Who is he, then, this havildar of gunners from Bareilly?" said one.

"And the other, Akhab Khan? They say he fought for the Nazarenes at Meerut. Mohammed Latif swears he defended the Treasury there," chimed in another.

"As for me, I care not who leads. I want my pay."

"I, too. I have not eaten since sunrise yesterday."

"We shall get neither food nor money till someone clears those accursed Feringhis off the hill," growled a deep voice close behind Malcolm.

There was something familiar in the tone. Frank edged away and glanced at the speaker, whom he recognised instantly as a subadar in his own old regiment !

But now a craning of necks and a sudden hush of the animated talk showed that some development was toward. Servants entered with cushions, which they disposed round the foot of the throne and at the base of its canopy. A few nobles and Court functionaries lounged in, two gorgeously apparelled guards came through the doorway, and behind them tottered a feeble old man, robed in white, and wearing on his head an aigrette of Bird of Paradise plumes fastened with a gold clasp, in which sparkled an immense emerald.

Malcolm had seen Bahadur Shah only once before. He remembered how decorous and dignified was the Mogul Court when Britain paid honour to an ancient dynasty. And now, what a change ! The aged Emperor had to lift a trembling hand to obtain a hearing, while, ever and anon, even during his short address, belated officers and troopers clattered in on horseback, and did not dismount within the precincts of the sacred Hall of Audience itself.

He began by explaining timorously that while affairs remained in their present unsettled condition he could not arrange matters as he would have wished. He knew that there were arrears of pay and that the food supply was irregular.

"But you do not help me," he said, with some display of spirit. "Respectable citizens tell me that you plunder their houses and debauch their wives and daughters. I have issued repeated injunctions prohibiting robbery and oppression in the city, but to no avail."

He was interrupted with loud murmurs.

"What matters it about the bazaar-folk, O King," yelled a sepoy. "We want food, not a sermon."

The Emperor seemed to fire up with indignation at the taunt, but he sank into the chair on the throne. He raised a hand twice to quieten the mob, and at last they allowed him to continue.

"I am wearied and helpless," he said faintly. "I have resolved to make a vow to pass the remainder of my life in service acceptable to Allah. I will relinquish my title and take the garb of a moullah. I am going to the shrine of Khwaja Sahib, and thence to Mecca, where I hope to end my sorrowful days."

This was not the sort of consolation that the mob expected or wanted. A howl of execration burst forth, but it was stayed by the entrance of two people from the private portion of the palace.

There was no need that Malcolm should ask who the pale, haughty, beautiful woman was who came and stood by her father's side. Roshinara Begum did not share the Emperor's dejection. She faced the rebels now with the air of one who knew them for the *canaille* they were. But that was only for an instant. A consummate actress, she had a part to play, and she bent and whispered something to Bahadur Shah with a great show of pleased vivacity.

A man who accompanied her stepped to the front of

the throne, and his words soon revealed to Malcolm that he was listening to the Shahzada, the heir-apparent, Mirza Moghul.

"Why do you come hither to disturb the King's pious meditations?" he cried angrily. "You were better employed at the batteries, where your loyal comrades are now firing a salute of twenty-one guns to celebrate the capture of Agra by the Neemuch Brigade."

He paused. His statement was news to all present, as, indeed, it well might be, seeing that it was a lie. But his half-petulant, half-boastful tone was convincing, and several voices were raised in a cry of "Shabash! Good hearing!"

"This is no time to create mischief and disunion," he went on loudly. "Help is coming from all quarters. Gwalior, Jhansi, Neemuch, and Lucknow are sending troops to aid us. In three or four days, if Allah be willing, the Ridge will be taken, and every one of the base unbelievers humbled and ruined and sent to the fifth circle of hell."

The man had the actor's trick of making his points. Waiting until an exultant roar of applause had died away, he delivered his most effective hit.

"At the very time you dared to burst in on the Emperor's privacy he was arranging a loan with certain local bankers that will enable all arrears of pay to be made up. To-day there will be a free issue of cattle, grain, and rice. Go, then! Tell these things to all men, and trust to the King of Kings and his faithful advisers, of whom I am at once the nearest and the most obedient, to lead you to victory against the Nazarenes."

For the hour these brave words sufficed. The sepoy

trooped out, and Malcolm went with them. A backward glance revealed the princess and her brother engaged in a conversation with Bahadur Shah and a courtier or two. Their gestures and manner of argument did not bear out the joyful tidings brought to the conclave by the Shahzada. Indeed, Frank guessed that they were soundly rating the miserable monarch for having allowed himself to speak so plainly to his beloved subjects.

He knew there was not a word of truth in Mirza Moghul's brief speech. The Gwalior Contingent had gone to Cawnpore. All the men Bareilly had to send had already arrived with Bukht Khan, the "havildar of artillery," who was now the King's right-hand man. Jhansi, Neemuch, and Lucknow had enough troubles of their own without helping Delhi, and as for the bankers' aid, it was easy to guess the nature of the "loan" that the Emperor hoped to extract from them.

Indeed, while Malcolm and Chumru and their new associates were wandering through the streets and making the circuit of the western wall, there was another incipient riot in the fort. Delay in issuing the promised rations enraged the hungry troops. A number hurried again to the Diwan-i-'Am, clamoured for the King's presence, and told him roundly that he ought to imprison his sons, who, they said, had stolen their pay.

"If the Treasury does not find the money," was the threat, "we will kill you and all your family, for we are masters."

This latter incident came to Malcolm's ears while Chumru was persuading a grain-dealer to admit that he had some corn hidden away. The sight of money unlocked the man's lips.

"Would there were more like you in the King's service," he whined. "I have not taken a rupee in the way of trade since the huzoors were driven forth."

It was easy enough to interpret the unhappy tradesman's real wishes. He was pining for the restoration of the British Raj. Every man in Delhi who had anything to lose mourned the day that saw the downfall of the Sirkar.¹

"Affairs go badly, then?" Malcolm put in. "Speak freely, friend. We are strangers, and are minded to go back whence we came, for there is naught but misrule in the city so far as we can see."

"What can you expect from an old man who writes verses when he should be punishing malefactors?" said the grain-dealer, bitterly anxious to vent his wrongs. "If you would act wisely, sirdar, leave this bewitched place. It is given over to devils. I am a Hindu, as you know, but I am worse treated by the Brahmins than by men of your faith."

"Mayhap you have quarrelled with some of the sepoy and have a sore feeling against them?"

"Think not so, sirdar. Who am I to make enemies of these lords? Every merchant in the bazaar is of my mind, and I have suffered less than many, for I am a poor man and have no family."

In response to Chumru's request the grain-dealer allowed the men to cook their food in an inner courtyard. While Malcolm extracted additional details as to the chaos that reigned in the city, the new-comers from Gwalior consulted among themselves. They had seen enough to be convinced that there were parts of

¹ The Government.

India much preferable to Delhi for residential purposes.

"Behold, sirdar," said one of them after they had eaten, "you led us in, and now we pray you lead us out again. There are plenty here to fight the Feringhis, and we may be more useful at Lucknow."

Malcolm could have laughed at the strangeness of his position, but he saw in this request the nucleus of a new method of winning his way beyond the walls.

"Bide here," he said gruffly, "until Ali Khan and I return, which we will surely do ere night. Then we shall consider what steps to take. At present, I am of the same mind as you."

He wanted to visit the Cashmere Gate and examine its defences. Then, he believed, he would have obtained all the information that Nicholson required. He was certain that Delhi would fall if once the British secured a footing inside the fortifications. The city was seething with discontent. Even if left to its own devices it would speedily become disrupted by the warring elements within its bounds.

Chumru and he rode first to the Mori Gate. Thence, by a side road, they followed the wall to the Cashmere Gate. Travelling as rapidly as the crowded state of the thoroughfare permitted, and thus wearing the semblance of being engaged on some urgent duty, they counted the guns in each battery and noted their positions.

Arrived at the Cashmere Gate, they loitered there a few minutes. This was the key of Delhi. Once it was won, a broad road led straight to the heart of the city,

with the palace on one hand and the Chandni Chauk on the other.

Malcolm saw with a feeling of unutterable loathing that the mutineers had converted St James's Church into a stable. Not so had the founder, Colonel James Skinner, treated the religions of the people among whom he lived. The legend goes that the gallant soldier, a veteran of the Mahratta wars, had married three wives, an Englishwoman, a Mohammedan, and a Hindu. His own religious views were of the nebulous order, but, so says the story, being hard pressed once in a fight, he vowed to build a church to his wife's memory if he escaped. His assailants were driven off, and the vow remained. When he came to give effect to it he was puzzled to know which wife he should honour, so he built a church, a mosque, and a temple, each at a corner of a triangular space just within the Cashmere Gate.

Whether the origin of the structures is correctly stated or not, they stand to this day where Skinner's workmen placed them, and it was a dastardly act on the part of men who worshipped in mosque and temple to profane the hallowed shrine of another and far superior faith.

Malcolm was sitting motionless on Nejdi, looking at a squad of rebels erecting fascines in front of a new battery on the river side of the gate, when Chumru, whose twisted vision seemed to command all points of the compass, saw that the commander of a cavalry guard stationed there was regarding them curiously.

"Turn to the right, huzoor," he muttered.

Malcolm obeyed instantly. The warning note in Chumru's voice was not to be denied. It would be folly to wait and question him.

"Now let us canter," said the other, as soon as the horses were fairly in the main road.

"You did well, sahib, to move quickly. There was one in the guard yonder whose eyes grew bigger each second that he looked at you."

They heard some shouting at the gate. A bend in the road near the ruined offices of the *Delhi Gazette* gave them a chance of increasing the pace to a gallop. There was a long, straight stretch in front, leading past the telegraph office, the dismantled magazine, and a small cemetery. Then the road turned again, and by a sharp rise gained the elevated plateau on which stood the fort.

Glancing over his shoulder at this point, Malcolm caught sight of a dozen sowars riding furiously after them. To dissipate any hope that they might not be in pursuit, he saw the leader point in his direction, and seemingly urge on his comrades. It was impossible to know for certain what had roused this nest of hornets, through the presence of a man of the 3rd Cavalry in the palace that morning was a sinister fact that led to only one conclusion. No matter what the motive, he felt that Chumru and he were trapped. There was no avenue of escape. Whether they went ahead or made a dash for the city their pursuers could keep them well in sight, as their tired horses were incapable of a sustained effort at top speed after having been on the move nearly twenty hours.

He had to decide quickly, and his decision must be governed not by personal consideration but by the needs of his country. If he had been recognised, the enemy would follow him. Therefore, Chumru might outwit them were he given a chance.

"Listen, good friend," he shouted as they clattered up the hill. "Thou seest the tope of trees in front?"

"Yes, sahib."

"This, then, is my last order, and it must be obeyed. When we reach those trees we will bear off towards the palace. Pull up there and dismount. Give me the reins of your horse, and hide yourself quickly among the trees. I shall ride on, and you may be able to dodge into some ditch or nullah till it is dark. Rejoin those men from Gwalior if possible, and try to get away from the city. Tell the General-sahib what you have seen, and that I sent you. Do you understand?"

"Huzoor!—"

"Silence! Wouldst thou have me fail in my duty? It is my parting wish, Chumru. There is no time for words. Do as I say, or we both die uselessly."

There was no answer. The Mohammedan's eyes blazed with the frenzy of a too complete comprehension of his master's intent. But now they were behind the trees, and Malcolm was already checking Nejdi. Chumru flung himself from the saddle and ran. Cowering amid some shrubs of dense foliage, he watched Malcolm gallop along the road to the Lahore Gate of the palace. A minute later the rebels thundered past, and they did not seem to notice that one of the two horses disappearing in the curved cutting that led to the drawbridge and side entrance of the gate was riderless.

Chumru ought to have taken immediate measures to secure his own safety. But he did nothing of the kind. He lay there, watching the hard-riding horsemen, and striving most desperately to do them all the harm that the worst sort of malign imprecations could effect.

They, in turn, vanished in the sunken approach to the fortress, and the unhappy bearer was imagining the horrible fate that had befallen the master whom he loved more than kith or kin when he saw the same men suddenly reappear and gallop towards the Delhi Gate, which was situated at a considerable distance.

Something had happened to disappoint and annoy them—that much he could gather from their gestures and impassioned speech. Whatever it was, Malcolm-sahib apparently was not dead yet, and while there is life there is hope.

Chumru proceeded to disrobe. He kicked off his boots, untied his putties, threw aside the frock-coat and breeches of a cavalry rissaldar, and stood up in the ordinary white clothing of a native servant.

“Shabash!” muttered he, as he unfastened the military badge in his turban. “There is nothing like a change of clothing to alter a man. Now I can follow my sahib and none be the wiser.”

With that he walked coolly into the roadway and stepped out leisurely towards the Lahore Gate. But he found the massive door closed, and the drawbridge raised, and a gruff voice bade him begone, as the gate would not be opened until the King’s orders were received.

CHAPTER XVI

IN THE VORTEX

MALCOLM was not one to throw his life away without an effort to save it. Once, during a visit to Delhi, Captain Douglas, the ill-fated commandant of the Palace Guards, had taken him to his quarters for tiffin. As it happened, the two entered by the Delhi Gate, and walked through the gardens and corridors to Douglas's rooms, which were situated over the Lahore Gate.

Thus, he possessed a vague knowledge of the topography of the citadel, and his visit that morning had refreshed his memory to a slight extent. On that slender reed he based some hope of escape. In any event, he prayed that his ruse might better Chumru's chances, and he promised himself a soldier's death if brought to bay inside the palace.

Crossing the drawbridge at a fast gallop, he saw a number of guards looking at him wonderingly. It occurred to him that the exciting events of the early hours might have led to orders being given on the question of admitting sepoys in large numbers. If that were so, he might gain time by a bit of sheer audacity. At any rate, there was no harm in trying. As he dashed through the gateway he shouted excitedly—

“Close and bar the door! None must be admitted without the King's special order!”

The spectacle of a well-mounted sepoy officer, blood-stained and travel-worn, who arrived in such desperate haste and was evidently pursued by a body of horse, so startled the attendants that they banged and bolted the great door without further ado.

Already the story was going the rounds that the precious life of Bahadur Shah had actually been threatened by the overbearing sepoys—what more likely than that this hard riding officer was coming to apprise his majesty of a genuine plot, while the flying squadron in the rear was striving to cut him down before the fateful message was delivered?

Not to create too great a stir, Malcolm pulled up both horses at the entrance to the arcade.

He called a chaprassi, and bade him hold Chumru's steed. Then, learning from the uproar at the gate that the guards were obeying his instructions literally, he went on at an easier pace.

The palace was humming with excitement. Its numerous buildings housed a multitude of Court nobles and other hangers-on to the Court, and each of these had his special coterie of attendants who helped to advance their own fortunes by clinging to their master's skirts.

The jealousies and intrigues that surround a throne were never more in evidence than at Delhi during the last hours of the Great Mogul. Already men were preparing for the final catastrophe. While the ignorant mob was firm in its belief that the rule of the sahib had passed for ever, those few clear-headed persons who possessed any claim to the title of statesmen were convinced that the Mutiny had failed.

Nearly four months were sped since that fatal Sunday when the rebellion broke out at Meerut. And what had been achieved? Delhi, the pivot of Mohammedan hopes, was crowded with a licentious soldiery, who obeyed only those leaders that pandered to them, who fought only when some perfervid moullah aroused their worst passions by his eloquence, and who were terrible only to peaceful citizens.

All public credit was destroyed. The rule of the King, nominal within the walls of his own palace, was laughed at in the city and ignored beyond its walls. The provincial satraps and feudatory princes who should be striving to help their sovereign were wholly devoted to the more congenial task of carving out kingdoms for themselves.

Nana Sahib, rehabilitated in Oudh, was opposing Havelock's advance; Khan Bahadur Khan, an expensioner of the Company, had set up a barbarous despotism at Bareilly; the Moulvie of Fyzabad, intent on the destruction of the Residency, meant to establish himself there as "King of Hindustan," if only that stubborn entrenchment could be carried; Mahudi Husain, Gaffur Beg, Kunwer Singh, the Ranee of Jhansi, and a host of other prominent rebels scattered throughout Oudh, Bengal, the North-West Provinces, and Central India, cared less for Delhi than for their own private affairs, and were consequently permitting the British to gather forces by which they could be destroyed piecemeal.

From Nepaul, the great border state lying behind the pestilential jungle of the Terai, came an army of 9,000 Goorkhas to help the British. At Hyderabad, the most

powerful Mohammedan principality in India, the Nizam and his famous minister, Sir Salar Jung, crushed a Jihad with cannon and grape-shot. In a word, the orgy had ended, and the day of reckoning was near.

Malcolm, therefore, was confronted with two separate and hostile sets of conditions. On the one hand, he was threading his way through a maze of conflicting interests, and this was a circumstance most favourable to his chances of escape; on the other, every man regarded his neighbour with distrust, and a stranger with positive suspicion, while Malcolm's distinguished appearance could not fail to draw many inquiring eyes.

He crossed the large garden beyond the arcade and was making for an arch that gave access to the long, covered passage leading to the Delhi Gate, when he saw Akhab Khan standing there.

The rebel leader was deep in converse with a richly-attired personage whom Frank discovered afterwards to be the Vizier. Near Akhab Khan an escort of sowars stood by their horses, and Malcolm felt that the instant the former lance-corporal set eyes on either Nejdi or himself, recognition would follow as surely as a vulture knows its prey.

He could neither dawdle nor hesitate. Wheeling Nejdi towards the nearest arch on the left, he found himself in an open space between the walls of the fortress and the outer line of buildings. Underneath the broad terrace from which the troops could defend the battlements stood a row of storerooms and go-downs. At a little distance he could distinguish a line of stables, and the mere sight sent the blood dancing through his veins.

If only he could evade capture until nightfall he would no longer feel that each moment might find him making a last fight against impossible odds. Dismounting, he led Nejdi to an unoccupied stall. As there was nothing to be gained by half measures, he removed saddle and bridle, hung them on a peg, put a halter on the arab, adjusted the heel-ropes, and hunted the adjoining stalls for forage.

He came upon some gram in a sack, and a quantity of hay. All provender was alike to Nejdi so long as it was toothsome. He was soon busily engaged, and Malcolm resolved to avoid observation by grooming him when anyone passed whose gaze might be too inquisitive.

He took care that sword and revolvers were handy. It was hard to tell what hue and cry might be raised by the troopers against whom the guards had closed the Lahore Gate. Perhaps they were searching for two men, and the finding of one horse in charge of a chaprassi might suggest that the rider of the other and his companion had dodged through the Delhi Gate.

Again, his pursuers might have galloped straight to the other exit, and thus made certain that he was still in the palace. If that were so, and they ferreted him out, as well die here as elsewhere. Meanwhile, he chewed philosophically at a few grains of the gram, and awaited the outcome of events that were now beyond his control.

A wild swirl of wind and rain seemed to favour him. There was not much traffic past his retreat, and that little ceased when a deluge lashed the dry earth and clouds of vapour rose as though the water were beating on an oven. Now and again a syce hurried past, his

head and shoulders enveloped in a sack. Once a party of sepoys trudged through the mud towards the water bastion of the palace, and the men whom they had relieved came back the same way a few minutes later.

Nejdi had seldom been groomed so vigorously as during the passing of these detachments, but no one gave the slightest heed to the cavalry officer who was engaged on such an unusual task. If they noticed him at all it was to wonder that he could be such a fool as to work when there were hundreds of loafers in the city who could be kicked to the job.

The rainstorm changed into a steady drizzle, and the increasing gloom promised complete darkness within half an hour. Malcolm was beginning to plan his movements when he became aware of a man wrapped in a heavy cloak who approached from the direction of the arcade and peered into every nook and cranny.

"Now," thought Frank, "comes my first real difficulty. That man is searching for someone. Whether or not he seeks me, he is sure to speak, and if my presence has been reported he will recognise both Nejdi and me instantly. If so, I must strangle him with as little ceremony as possible."

The new-comer came on. In the half-light it was easy to see that he was not a soldier, but a Court official. Indeed, before the searcher's glance rested on the grey arab munching contentedly in his stall, or the tall sowar who stood in obscurity near his head, Frank felt almost sure that he was face to face with the trusted confidant who had carried out Roshinara Begum's behests in the garden of Bithoor.

That fact saved the native's life. The Englishman would have killed him without compunction were it not for the belief that the man was actually looking for him and for none other, and with friendly intent, too, else he would have brought a bodyguard.

Sure enough, the stranger's first words were of good import. He could not see clearly into the dark stable, and it was necessary to measure one's utterances in Delhi just then.

"If you are one who rode into Delhi this morning, I would have speech with you," he muttered softly.

"Say on," said Malcolm, gripping his sword.

"Nay, one does not give the Princess Roshinara's instructions without knowing that they reach the ears they are meant for."

The Englishman came out from the obscurity. He approached so quickly that the native started back, being far from prepared for Frank's very convincing resemblance to a rissaldar of cavalry.

"I look for one—" he began, but Frank had no mind to lose time.

"For Malcolm-sahib?" he demanded.

"It might be some such name," was the hesitating answer.

"I am he. I saw thee last at Bithoor, when I escaped with Mayne-sahib and the missy-baba."¹

"By Mohammed! I would not have known you, sahib, though now I remember your face. Come with me, and quickly. Each moment here means danger."

"Ay, for thee. I am not one to be tricked so easily."

"Huzoor, have I not sought you without arms or

¹ The familiar native title for a European young lady.

escort? I and another have searched the palace these two hours. Leave your horse. I will have him tended. Come, sahib, I pray you. The Begum awaits you, but there are so many who know of your presence that I shall not be able to save you if you fall into their hands."

These were fair-seeming words, with the ring of truth about them. At any rate, Malcolm's whereabouts were no longer a secret, and it would not be war but murder to offer violence to one who came with good intent on his lips if not in his heart.

"Lead on," said Frank, sternly, "and remember that I shall not hesitate to strike at the first sign of treachery."

"I shall not betray you, sahib, but you must converse with me as we walk, and not draw too many eyes by holding a naked sword."

This was so manifestly reasonable that Malcolm felt rather ashamed of his doubts. Yet he thought it best not to appear to relax his precautions.

"I would not pass through the palace with a sword in my hand," he said with a quiet laugh, "but I have a pistol in my belt, and that will suffice for six men."

His guide set off at a rapid pace. When they were near the great arch leading into the garden they halted in front of a small door in a dimly-lighted building, and the native rapped twice with his knuckles on three separate panels. Some bolts were drawn and the two were admitted, the door being instantly barred behind them by an attendant. The darkness in the passage was impenetrable. Frank held himself tensely, but his companion's voice reached him from a little distance in front, while he heard other bolts being drawn.

"You will see your way more clearly now," was the reassuring message, and, when the second door was opened, the rays of a lamp lit the stone walls and floor. They went on, through lofty corridors, across sequestered gardens and by way of many a stately chamber until another narrow passage terminated in a barred door guarded by an armed native. The man's shrill voice betokened his calling, and Frank knew that he was standing at the entrance to the zenana.

"There is one other within," said the guard, leering at them.

"Who is it, slave?" asked Frank's guide scornfully, for he was annoyed by the eunuch's familiar tone.

"Nay, I obey orders," was the tart response. "Enter, then, and may Allah prosper you."

There was a hint of danger in the otherwise excellent wish, but the man unlocked the door, and they passed within.

Frank's wondering eyes rested on a scene of fairy-like beauty, so exquisite in its colourings and so unexpected withal, that not even his desperate predicament could repress for an instant the feeling of astonishment that overwhelmed him. He was standing in a white marble chamber, pillared and roofed in the Byzantine style, while every shaft and arch was chiselled into graceful lines and adorned with traceries or carved festoons of fruit and flowers.

The walls were brightened with mosaics wrought in precious stones. Texts from the Koran, in the flowing Persi-Arabic script, ran above the arches. In the floor, composed of coloured tiles, was set a *pachisi*¹ board, as

¹ A game of the draughts order, much played by native ladies.

the wide entrance-hall to a European house might have a chessboard incorporated with the design of the tiled floor.

Not a garish tint or inharmonious line interfered with the chaste elegance of the white marble, and the whole apartment, which seemed to be the anteroom of the ladies' quarters, was lighted with Moorish lamps.

Malcolm took in some of these details in one amazed glance, but his thoughts were recalled sternly to the affairs of the moment by hearing the ring of spurred heels on the sharp-sounding pavement from behind a curtained arch. There was no time to retreat or cross towards an alcove that promised some slight screen from the soft and penetrating light that filled the room. He saw that his guide was perturbed, but he asked no question. With the quick military tread came the frou-frou of silk and the footfall of slippered feet. Then the curtain was drawn aside, and Akhab Khan entered, followed by the Princess Roshinara.

Malcolm had the advantage of a few seconds' warning. Even as Akhab Khan placed his hand on the curtain, the Englishman sprang forward, and the astounded sowar, now a brigadier in the rebel forces, found himself looking into the muzzle of a revolver.

"Do not move till I bid you, Akhab Khan," said Malcolm in his self-contained way. "I was summoned hither, so I came, but it may be necessary to secure a hostage for my safe-conduct outside the walls again."

"You! Malcolm-sahib!" was Akhab Khan's involuntary outburst.

"Yes, even I. Have you not heard, then, that I rode into the palace to-day?"

"There was a report that some Feringhis—some sahibs—were in the city as spies—"

"Malcolm-sahib is here because I sent for him," broke in Roshinara.

"You—*sent* for him!"

Akhab Khan's swarthy features paled, and his eyes sparkled wrathfully. Heedless of Malcolm's implied threat, or, perhaps, ignoring it, he wheeled round on the princess, and his right hand crossed to his sword-hilt.

"If you so much as turn your head again, or lift a hand without my order, I blow your brains out," said Malcolm in the same unemotional tone.

"Nay, let him attack a woman if it pleaseth him," cried Roshinara, who had not drawn back one inch from the place where she was standing when Malcolm confronted Akhab Khan and herself. "That is what our troops, officers and men alike, are best fitted for. They love to swagger in the bazaar, but their valour flies when they see the Ridge."

Again, quite indifferent to the fact that Malcolm's finger was on the trigger, the rebel leader threw out his hands towards the Begum in a gesture of agonised protest.

"Do you not trust me, my heart?" he murmured. "If you knew of this Nazarene's presence, why was I not told?"

"Because I wished to save you in spite of yourself. Because I would mourn you if you fell in battle as befits a warrior and the man whom I love; but I would not have you die on the scaffold, as most of the others will die ere another month be sped. What hope have we of success? If 40,000 sepoy cannot overcome the 3,000

English on the Ridge, how shall they prevail against the force that is now preparing to storm Delhi? I sent for Malcolm-sahib that I might obtain terms for my father and for thee, Akhab Khan. This man is now in our power. Let us bargain with him. If he goes free to-day, let him promise that we shall be spared when the gallows is busy in front of our palace."

Each word of this impassioned speech was a revelation to Malcolm. Here was the fiery beauty of the Mogul Court pleading for the lives of her father and lover, pleading to him, a solitary Briton in the midst of thousands of mutineers, a prisoner in their stronghold, a spy whose life was forfeit by the laws of war. Hardly less bewildering than this turn of fortune's wheel was the whirligig that promoted a poor trooper of John Company to the position of accepted suitor for the hand of a royal maiden. Never could there be a more complete unveiling of the Eastern mind, with all its fatalism, its strange weaknesses, its uncontrollable passions.

Akhab Khan stretched out his arms again.

"Forgive me, my soul, if I did doubt thee," he almost sobbed.

The girl was the first to recover her self-control.

"Put away your pistol," she said, fixing her fine eyes on Malcolm with a softness in their limpid depths that he had never seen there before. "If we can contrive, my plighted husband and I, you will not need it to-night. I was rejoiced to hear that you were within our gates. We are beaten. I know it. We have lost a kingdom because wretches like Nana Dundhu Punt, of Bithoor, have forgotten their oaths, and preferred drunken revels to empire. Were they of my mind, were they as loyal

and honourable as the man I hope to marry, we would have driven you and yours into the sea Malcolm-sahib. But Allah willed otherwise, and we can only bow to his decree. It is Kismet. I am content. Say, then, if you are sent in safety to your camp, do you, in return, guarantee the two lives I ask of you?"

Malcolm could not help looking at Akhab Khan before he answered. The handsome young soldier had folded his arms, and his eyes dwelt on Roshinara's animated face with a sad fixity that bespoke at once his love and his despair.

Then the Englishman placed the revolver in his belt and bowed low before the woman who reposed such confidence in him.

"If the issue rested with me, Princess," he said, "you need have no fear for the future. I am only a poor officer, and I have small influence. Yet I promise that such power as I possess shall be exerted in your behalf, and I would remind you that we English neither make war on women nor treat honourable enemies as felons."

"My father is a feeble old man," she cried vehemently. "It was not by his command that your people were slain. And Akhab Khan has never drawn his sword save in fair fight."

"I can vouch for Akhab Khan's treatment of those who were at his mercy," said Malcolm, generously.

"Nay, sahib, you repaid me that night," said the other, not to be outdone in this exchange of compliments. "But, if I have the happiness to find such favour with my lady, that she plots to save me against my will, I cannot forget that I lead some thousands of sepoy who have faith in me. You have been examining our de-

fences all day. Sooner would I fall on my sword here and now than that I should connive at the giving of information to an enemy which should lead to the destruction of my men."

Malcolm had foreseen this pitfall in the smooth road that was seemingly opening before him.

"I would prefer to become the bearer of terms than of information," he said.

"Terms? What terms? How many hands in this city are free of innocent blood? Were I or any other to propose a surrender, we should be torn limb from limb."

"Then I must tell you that I cannot accept your help at the price of silence. When I undertook this mission I knew its penalties. I am still prepared to abide by them. Let me remind you that it is I, not you, who can impose conditions within these four walls."

Akhab Khan paled again. His was the temperament that shows anger by the token which reveals cowardice in some men; it is well to beware of him who enters a fight with bloodless cheeks and grey lips. But Roshinara sprang between them with an eager cry.

"What folly is this that exhausts itself on a point of honour? Does not every spy who brings us details of each gun and picket on the Ridge tell the sahib-log all that they wish to know of our strength and our dissensions? Will not the man who warned us of the presence of an officer-sahib in our midst to-day go back and sell the news of a sepoy regiment's threat to murder the King? Have done with these idle words—let us to acts! Nawab-ji!"

"Heaven-born!" Malcolm's guide advanced with a deep salaam.

"See to it that my orders are carried out. Mayhap thine own head may rest easier on its shoulders if there is no mischance."

The Nawab-ji bowed again, and assured the Presence that there would be no lapse on his part. Akhab Khan had turned away. His attitude betokened utter dejection, but the princess, not the first of her sex to barter ambition for love, was radiant with hope.

"Go, Malcolm-sahib," she whispered, "and may Allah guard you on the way!"

"I have one favour to ask," he said. "My devoted servant, a man named Chumru—"

She smiled with the air of a woman who breathes freely once more after passing through some grave peril.

"How, then, do you think I found out the identity of the English officer who had dared to enter Delhi?" she asked. "Your man came to me, not without difficulty, and told me you were here. It was he who inspired me with the thought that your presence might be turned to good account. But go, and quickly. He is safe."

Frank hardly knew how to bid her farewell until he remembered that, if of royal birth, Princess Roshinara was also a beautiful woman. He took her hand and raised it to his lips, a most unusual proceeding in the East, but the tribute of respect seemed to please her.

Following the nawab, he traversed many corridors and chambers and ultimately reached an apartment in which Chumru was seated. That excellent bearer was smoking

a hookah with a couple of palace servants, and doubtless exchanging spicy gossip with the freedom of Eastern manners and conversation.

"Shabash!" he cried when his crooked gaze fell on Malcolm. "By the tomb of Nizam-ud-din, there are times when women are useful."

They were let down from a window on the river face of the palace, and taken by a boat to the bank of the Jumna above Ludlow Castle, while the nawab undertook to deliver their horses next day at the camp. He carried out his promise to the letter, nor did he forget to put forth a plea in his own behalf against the hour when British bayonets would be probing the recesses of the fort and its occupants.

When Nicholson came out of the mess after supper he found Malcolm waiting for an audience. Chumru, still wearing the servant's livery in which the famous brigadier had last seen him, was squatting on the ground near his master. The general was not apt to waste time in talk, and he had a singular knack of reading men's thoughts by a look.

"Glad to see you back again, Major Malcolm," he cried. "I hope you were successful."

"It is for you to decide, sir, when you have heard my story," and, without further preamble, Frank gave a clear narrative of his adventures since dawn. Not a word did he say about the very things he had been sent to report on, and Nicholson understood that a direct order alone would unlock his lips. When Frank ended, the general frowned and was silent. In those days men did not hold honour lightly, and Nicholson was a fine type of soldier and gentleman.

"Confound it!" he growled, "this is awkward, very awkward," and Malcolm felt bitterly that the extraordinary turn taken by events in the palace was in a fair way towards depriving his superiors of the facts they were so anxious to learn. Suddenly the big man's deep eyes fell on Chumru.

"Here, you," he growled, "was aught said to thee whereby thou hast a scruple to tell me how many guns defend the Cashmere Gate?"

"Huzoor," said Chumru, "there are but two things that concern me—my master's safety and the size of that jaghir your honour promised me."

Nicholson laughed with an almost boyish mirth.

"By gad," he cried, "you are fortunate in your friends, Malcolm." Then he turned to Chumru again. "The jaghir is of no mean size," he said, "but I shall see to it that a field is added for every useful fact you make known."

Frank listened to his servant's enumeration of the guns and troops at the Lahore, Mori, and Cashmere Gates, and he was surprised at the accuracy of Chumru's mental note-taking.

"I need not have gone at all, sir," he could not help commenting when the bearer had answered Nicholson's final question. "I seem to have a Napoleon for a valet."

The brigadier laid a kindly hand on Frank's shoulder.

"You forget that you have brought me the most important news of all," he said. "The enemy is defeated before the first ladder is planted against their walls. They know it, and thanks to you, now we know it. My

only remaining difficulty is not to take Delhi, but to screw up our chief to make the effort."

Then his voice sank to a deep growl.

"But I'll bring him to reason, I will, by Heaven, even if I risk being cashiered for insubordination!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE EXPIATION

Two hours after midnight—that is a time of rest and peace in most lands ; men have either ceased or not yet begun their toil. Even warfare, the deadliest task of all, slackens its energy, and the ghostly reaper leans on his scythe while wearied soldiers sleep.

Wellington knew this when he said that the bravest man was he who possessed “two o’clock in the morning” courage, for shadows then become real, and dangers anticipated but unseen are magnified tenfold.

Yet, soon after two o’clock in the morning of September 14th, 1857, 4,500 soldiers assembled behind the Ridge for the greatest achievement that the Mutiny had demanded during the four months of its wonderful history.

They were divided into five columns, one being a reserve, and the task before them was to carry by assault a strongly fortified city surrounded by seven miles of wall and ditch, held by 40,000 trained soldiers, and equipped with ample store of guns and ammunition. Success meant the certain loss of one man among four ; failure would carry with it a rout and massacre unexampled in modern war.

Men had fallen in greater numbers in the Crimea, it is true ; a British army had been swallowed alive in the wild Khyber Pass ; but these were only incidents in

prolonged campaigns, whereas the collapse of the assailants of Delhi would set free a torrent of murder, rapine and pillage, such as the utmost triumph of the rebels had not yet produced.

The Punjab, the whole of the North-West, Central India, and Rajputana, all northern Bengal and Bombay, must have been submerged in the flood if the gates of Delhi were unbarred. It is not to be marvelled at, therefore, that General Wilson, the Commander-in-Chief, "looked nervous and anxious" as he rode slowly along the front of the gathering columns, nor that many of the British officers and men received the Holy Communion at the hands of their chaplains ere they mustered for what might prove to be their last parade.

In some tents of their own accord the soldiers read the Old Testament lesson of the day. With that extraordinary aptness which the chronicles of the prophets often display in their relation to current events, the chapter foretold the doom of Nineveh: "Woe to the bloody city. It is full of lies and robbery. . . . Draw the waters for the siege, fortify thy strongholds. . . . Then shall the fire devour thee: the sword shall cut thee off; it shall eat thee up like the canker-worm."

How thrilling, how intensely personal and human, these words must have sounded in their ears, for it should ever be borne in mind that the Britons who recovered India in '57 were not only determined to avenge the barbarities inflicted on unoffending women and children, but were inspired by a religious enthusiasm that showed itself in almost every diary kept and letter sent home during the war.

And now, while the brilliant stars were dimmed by bursting shells and rockets hissing in glowing curves across the sky, the columns moved forward.

English, Scotch, Irish and Welsh—swarthy Pathans, bearded Sikhs, dapper little Goorkhas—marched side by side, from the first column on the left, commanded by Nicholson, to the fourth on the extreme right, led by Reid.

The plan of attack was daring and soldierlike. John Nicholson, ever claiming the post of utmost danger, elected to hurl his men across the breach made by the big guns in the Cashmere Bastion, the strongest of the many strong positions held by the enemy. The second column, under Brigadier Jones, was to storm the second breach in the walls at the Water Bastion. The third, headed by Colonel Campbell, was to pass through the Cashmere Gate when the gallant six who had promised to blow open the gate itself had accomplished their task, while the fourth column, under Major Reid, undertook to clear the suburbs of Kishengunge and Pahadunpore, and force its way into the city by way of the Lahore Gate.

Brigadier Longfield, commanding the reserve, had to follow and support Nicholson. Generally speaking, if each separate attack made good its objective, the different columns were to link up along the walls, form posts, and combine for the bombardment and escalade of the fortress-palace.

Nicholson, who directed the assault, had not forgotten the half-implied bargain made between Malcolm and the Princess Roshinara. Strict orders were given that the King and members of the royal family were to be

taken prisoners if possible. As for Akhab Khan and other leaders of rebel brigades, it was impossible to distinguish them among so many. Not even Nicholson could ask his men to be generous in giving quarter when nine out of every ten mutineers they encountered were less soldiers than slayers of women and children.

At last, in the darkness, the columns reached their allotted stations and halted. The Engineers, carrying ladders, crept to the front.

Nicholson placed a hand on Jones's shoulder.

"Are you ready?" he asked, with the quiet confidence in the success of his self-imposed mission that caused all men to trust in him implicitly.

"Yes," answered Jones.

Nicholson turned to Malcolm and two others of his aides.

"Tell the gunners to cease fire," he said.

Left and right they hurried, stumbling over the broken ground to reach the batteries which were thundering at short range against the fast-crumbling walls. In No. 2, which Malcolm entered, he found a young lieutenant of artillery, Frederick Sleigh Roberts, working a heavy gun almost single-handed, so terribly had the Royal Regiment suffered in the contest waged with the rebel gunners during seven days and nights.

Almost simultaneously, the three batteries became silent. With a heart-stirring cheer the Rifles dashed forward and fired a volley to cover the advance of the ladder men, and the first step was taken in the actual capture of Delhi.

The loud yell of the Rifles served as a signal to the other columns. The second, gallantly led by Jones,

rushed up to the Water Bastion and entered it, but not until twenty-nine out of thirty-nine men carrying ladders were killed or wounded. On Jones's right Nicholson, ever in the van, seemed to lift his column by sheer strength of will through an avalanche of musketry, heavy stones, grape-shot, and bayonet thrusts, while the rebels, swarming like wasps to the breach, inspired each other by hurling threats and curses at the Nazarenes.

But to stop Nicholson and his host they must kill every man, and be killed themselves in the killing, and, not having the stomach for that sort of fight, they ran.

Thus far a magnificent success had been achieved. It was carried further, almost perfected, by the splendid self-sacrifice displayed by the six who had promised to blow open the Cashmere Gate. To this day their names are blazoned on a tablet between its two arches :

“Lieutenants Home and Salkeld, of the Engineers, Bugler Hawthorne of the 52nd, and Sergeants Carmichael, Smith and Burgess, of the Bengal Sappers.”

Smith and Hawthorne lived to wear the Victoria Crosses awarded for their feat. The others, while death glazed their eyes and dimmed their ears, may have known by the rush of men past where they lay that their sacrifice had not been in vain. The stout timbers and iron bands were rent by the powder-bags, and the third column fought a passage through the double gateway into the tiny square in front of St James's Church.

Then, as if the story of Delhi were to serve as a microcosm of Fortune's smiles and frowns in human affairs, the victorious career of the British columns

received a serious, almost a mortal, check. The mutineers were in full retreat, terror-stricken and dismayed. Thousands were already crossing the bridge of boats when the word went round that the Feringhis were beaten.

They were not, but the over-caution against which Nicholson had railed for months again betrayed itself in the failure of the second column to capture the Lahore Gate when that vital position lay at its mercy. Audacity, ever excellent in war, is sound as a proposition of Euclid in operations against Asiatics.

Brigadier and men had done what they were asked to do; they ought to have done more. Having penetrated beyond the Mori Bastion, they fell back and fortified themselves against counter-assault, thus displaying unimpeachable tactics, but bad generalship in view of the enemy's demoralisation.

Instantly Akhab Khan, who commanded in that quarter of the city, claimed a victory. The mutineers flocked back to their deserted posts. While one section pressed Jones hard, another fell on Reid's Goorkhas and the cavalry brigade. They actually pushed the counter attack as far as Hindu Rao's house on the Ridge, until Hope Grant's cavalry and Tombs's magnificent horse artillery tackled them. A terrific *mêlée* ensued. Twenty-five out of fifty gunners were killed or wounded, the 9th Lancers suffered with equal severity, but the rebels were held, punished, and defeated, after two hours of desperate conflict.

The mischance at the Lahore Gate cost England a life she could ill spare. When he heard what had happened, Nicholson ran to the Mori Bastion, gathered

men from both columns, and tried to storm the Lahore Bastion at all hazards. It was asking too much, but those gallant hearts did not falter. They followed their beloved leader into a narrow lane, the only way from the one point to the other. They fell in scores, but Nicholson's giant figure still towered in front. With sword raised, he shouted to the survivors to come on. Then a bullet struck him in the chest and he fell.

With him, for a time, drooped the flag of Britain. So dire was the resultant confusion, that Lord Roberts tells in his memoirs how he found Nicholson, wounded unto death, lying in his dhooly near the Cashmere Gate. Even his bearers had fled, and no man knew what would happen next. Although Baird Smith, a skilled engineer and artilleryman, had secured against a *coup de main* that small portion of the city now occupied by the besiegers, General Wilson was minded to withdraw the troops. Even now he considered the task of subduing Delhi to be beyond their powers. Baird Smith insisted that he should hold on; Nicholson sent a typical message from his death-bed on the Ridge that he still had strength enough left to struggle to his feet and pistol the first man who counselled retreat, and the harassed Commander-in-Chief consented to the continuance of the fighting.

Although his judgment was mistaken, he had good reasons for it. Akhab Khan, on whom the real leadership devolved when it became known that the King and his sons had fled from the palace, tried a ruse that might well have proved fatal to his adversaries.

Counting on the exhaustion of the British and the privations they had endured during the long months on

the Ridge, he caused the deserted streets between the Cashmere and Mori Gates to be strewed with bottles of wine, beer and spirits. To men enfeebled by heat and want of food the liquor was more deadly than lead or steel.

Were it not that Akhab Khan himself was shot through the forehead while trying to repel the advance of Taylor's Engineers along the main road to the palace from the Cashmere Gate, it was well within the bounds of possibility that the afternoon of the 14th might have witnessed a British *débâcle*.

In one respect the sepoy commander's death was as serious to his cause as the loss of Nicholson to the English. The rebels, fighting fiercely enough in small detachments, but no longer controlled by a man who knew how to use their vastly superior numbers, allowed themselves to be dealt with in detail. Soon the British attack was properly organised, and a six days' orgy of destruction began.

Although no Briton was seen to injure a woman or child in the streets or houses of Delhi, the avenging army spared no man. Unhappily, thousands of harmless citizens were slaughtered side by side with the mutineers. The British had received a great provocation, and they exacted a terrible payment.

On the 20th the gates of the palace were battered in, and the British flag was hoisted from its topmost turret. Then, and not till then, did Delhi fall. The last of the Moguls was driven from the halls which had witnessed the grandeur and pomp of his imperial predecessors, and the great city passed into the hands of

the new race that had come to leaven the decaying East.

It was a dearly-bought triumph. On September 14th the conquering army lost sixty-six officers and eleven hundred and four men. Between May 30th and September 20th, the total British casualties were nearly four thousand.

Malcolm soon learnt that the Princess Roshinara had fled with her father and brothers. Probably the death of Akhab Khan had unnerved her, and she dared not trust to the mercy of the victors. Frank was among the first to enter the palace. After a few fanatical ghazees were made an end of he hurried towards the zenana. It was empty. He searched its glittering apartments with feverish anxiety, but he met no human being until some men of the 75th entered and began to prise open boxes and cupboards in the search for loot.

After that, his duties took him to the Ridge, and it was not until all was over that he heard how Hodson had captured the King and shot the royal Princes with his own hand. This tragedy took place on the road from Humayun's Tomb, whither the wretched monarch retreated when it was seen that Delhi must yield.

Hodson claimed to be an executioner, not a murderer. He held that he acted under the pressure of a mob intent on rescuing Mirza Moghul, the heir-apparent, and his brother and son. That all three were cowardly ruffians, and merciless in their treatment of the English captured in Delhi on May 11th, cannot be denied, but Hodson's action was condemned by many, and it was perhaps as well that he found a soldier's grave during Colin Campbell's advance on Lucknow.

It was there that the fortune of war next brought Malcolm. Delhi had scarce quieted down after the storm and fury of the week's street-fighting when Havelock, reinforced by Outram, drove the relief force through the insurgent ring around the Residency like some stout ship forcing her way to port through a raging sea. No sooner had he entered the entrenchment on September 25th than the rebel waves surged together again in his rear, and on the 27th the Residency was again invested almost as closely as ever. But the new column infused vigour and hope in the hearts of a garrison that had ceased even to despair.

Apathy, a quiet waiting for death, was the prevalent attitude in Lucknow, until the Highland bonnets were seen tossing above the last line of mutineers that tried to bar their passage through the streets. At once the besieged took up the offensive. The lines were greatly extended, the enemy's advanced posts were carried with the bayonet, troublesome guns were seized and spiked, and the rebel mining operations summarily stopped.

Two days before Havelock's little army cut its way into Lucknow, Ungud, the pensioner, crept in to the retrenchment and announced the coming relief. He was not believed. Twice already had he brought that cheering message, and events had falsified his news.

Winifred, a worn and pallid Winifred by this time, sought him and asked for tidings of Malcolm. He had none. There was a rumour that Delhi had fallen, and an officer had told him that there was a Major Malcolm on Nicholson's staff. That was all. Not a letter, not a sign, came to reassure the heart-broken girl, so the joy

of Havelock's arrival was dimmed for her by the uncertainty that obtained in regard to her lover's fate.

Then the dreadful waiting began again. After having endured a plague of heat in the hot weather, the remnant of the original garrison was subjected to the torment of cold in the months that followed. In Upper India the change of temperature is so remarkably sudden that it is incomprehensible to those who live in more favoured climes. Early in October the thermometer falls by many degrees each day. The reason is, of course, that the diminishing power of the sun permits the earth to throw off by night the heat, always intense, stored during the day. Something in the nature of an atmospheric vacuum is thus created, and the resultant cold continues until the opposite effect brings about the lasting heat of the summer months, which begin about March 15th in that part of India.

But scientific explanations of unpleasant phenomena are poor substitutes for scanty clothing. In some respects the last position of the beleaguered garrison was worse than the first, and the days wore on in seemingly endless misery, until absolutely authentic intelligence arrived on November 9th that Sir Colin Campbell was at Bunnee, and would march forthwith to relieve the Residency.

Then Outram, who had succeeded to the chief command as soon as Havelock joined hands with Inglis, called for a volunteer who would act as Sir Colin's guide through the network of canals, roads, and scattered suburbs that added to the dangers of Lucknow's narrow streets, and a man named Kavanagh, an uncovenanted civilian, offered his services.

It is not hard to picture Kavanagh's lot if he were captured by the mutineers. His own views were definite on the point. Beneath his native disguise he carried a pistol, not for use against an enemy, but to take his own life if he failed to creep through the investing lines. But he succeeded, and lived to be the only civilian hero ever awarded the Victoria Cross.

Another incident of the march should be noted. Malcolm saw preparations being made to hang a Mohammedan who was suspected of having ill-treated Europeans. The man protested his innocence, but he was not listened to. Then Frank, thinking he remembered his face, questioned him, and found he was the zamindar who helped Winifred, her uncle, and himself during the flight from Cawnpore.

Such testimony from an officer more than sufficed to outweigh the slight evidence against the prisoner, who was set at liberty forthwith. During the remainder of his life he had ample leisure to reflect on the good fortune that led him to help the people who sought his assistance on that June night. Were it not for Malcolm's interference he would have been hanged without mercy, and possibly not without good cause.

On the afternoon of November 11th, Sir Colin Campbell reviewed his little army. It was drawn up in parade order, on a plain a few miles south of the Dilkusha. Three thousand four hundred men faced him, and the smallness of the number is eloquent of the magnitude of their task. Indeed, that is one of the salient features of each main episode of the Mutiny. Nicholson at Delhi, Havelock at Cawnpore and on the way to Lucknow, Colin Campbell in the pending action,

and Sir Hugh Rose in many a hard-fought battle in Central India, one and all were called on to attack and defeat ten times the number of sepoys.

But what fine troops they were who met the Commander-in-Chief's gaze as they stood marshalled there on that dusty Indian *maidan*! Peel's sailors, with eight heavy guns; artillerymen standing by the cannon that had sounded the knell of Delhi from below the Ridge; the 9th Lancers, who held the right flank when the capture of Hindu Rao's house would have meant the collapse of the assault; the 8th and 75th Foot, the 2nd and 4th Punjabis—all these had followed the Lion of the Punjab when he stormed the Cashmere Bastion.

Sikh Cavalry, too, and Hodson's wild horsemen, and many another gallant soldier fresh from the immortal siege, returned the General's quiet scrutiny as he rode past, and doubtless wondered how he would compare as a leader with the man whom they had left in the little cemetery at the foot of the Ridge.

It is on record that from the end of the line came a yell of welcome and recognition. The 93rd Highlanders remembered what Campbell had done in the Crimea, and their joyful slogan brought a flush to the bronzed face of the old war-dog when he learnt the significance of their greeting.

Next morning began a three days' battle. Perhaps there was never an action so spectacular, so thrilling, so amazingly in earnest, as the continuous fight which brought about the second relief of Lucknow. At the Alumbagh, at the Dilkusha and La Martinière school, at the Secunder Bagh and the Shah Nujeef, were fought fiercely-contested combats that in other campaigns

would have figured as independent battles, each highly important in the history of the time.

The taking of the Shah Nujeef alone was worthy of Homeric praise. It was a mosque that stood in a garden, bounded by a high and stout wall, and protected by jungle and mud hovels. Its peculiar position, joined to the number of guns mounted on its walls and the thousands of sepoy who held it, made it impossible for a devoted artillery to create an effective breach. Yet if the relieving force failed here, they failed altogether. So Sir Colin asked his men for a supreme effort.

Riding forward himself, accompanied by his staff and Sir Adrian Hope, Colonel of the 93rd, he cheered on his loved Highlanders. Cannot one hear the pipes amid that din of cannon and musketry? Cannot one see the shot-torn colours fluttering in the breeze, the plaids of the gallant Highland gentlemen who led the 93rd vanishing in the smoke and dust?

Middleton's battery of the Royal Artillery came dashing up, "the drivers waving their whips, the gunners their caps," unlimbered within forty yards of the wall, and opened fire with grape. Men and horses fell in scores, but somehow, anyhow, an entrance was gained and the Shah Nujeef was taken. Feeble must be the pulse that does not beat faster, dim the eye that does not kindle, as one hears how those Britons fought and died, but did not die in vain.

Next day Captain Garnet Wolseley led a storming party against the Motee Mahal, and the self-sacrificing heroism of the Shah Nujeef was displayed again here, and with the same result.

And so the wild fight went on, till Outram and Have-

lock, Napier, Eyre, Havelock's son, and four other officers ran from the Residency through a tempest of lead showered on them from the Kaiser Bagh, and Hope Grant, dashing forward from the van of Colin Campbell's force, shook hands with the hero of the First Relief.

Half an hour later Malcolm entered the Residency. At first sight it was an abode of sorrow. Death and ruin seemed to have combined there to wreak their spite on mankind and his belongings. Even the men and women whom he met were tear-laden, and it was not till he heard their happy voices that he knew they were weeping because of the overwhelming joy in their souls.

He hurried on, scanning each excited group for one face that he thought he would recognise were it fifty years instead of five months since their last meeting. He, of course, was even a finer-looking and better set-up soldier now than when he galloped along the flame-lit roads of Meerut on that never-to-be-forgotten Sunday night in May, and it is not to be wondered at if he failed to allow for the effect on Winifred of the ordeal she had gone through.

Perhaps his keen eyes were covered with a mist, perhaps the growing fear in his heart forbade his tongue to ask a question because he dreaded the answer. Perhaps sheer agitation may have rendered him incapable of distinguishing one among so many. Howsoever that may be, he knew nothing, saw no one, until a wan, slim-figured woman, a woman clothed in tattered rags, down whose pallid cheeks streamed the divine tears of happiness, touched his arm and sobbed—

"Are you looking for me—dear?"

The Mutiny was by no means ended with the fall of Delhi and the Second Relief of Lucknow. North and South and East and West the rebels were hunted with untiring zeal. Sometimes in scattered bands, less often in formidable armies, they were pursued, encountered, and annihilated.

Quickly degenerating into mere robber hordes, they became a pest to the unhappy villagers in the remoter parts of the different provinces, and it was long ere the last embers of the fire that had raged so fiercely were stamped out. Nana Sahib, the infamous, was hunted into the jungles of Nepaul, where, it is said, he was killed by a tiger. Tantia Topi was hanged; the Moulvie of Fyzabad and the Ranee of Jhansi were shot in action.

But the end came, and on November 1st, 1858, amid salvoes of artillery and to the accompaniment of festivities innumerable, Queen Victoria proclaimed the abolition of the East India Company and assumed the sovereignty of the country. Her Majesty took no territory, confirmed all treaties, promised religious toleration and civil equality to all her Indian subjects, and gave full and complete pardon to every rebel who was not a murderer.

The Queen's gracious and peace-bringing words supplied a fitting close to India's Red Year. Europeans and natives alike tried to forget both the crime and its punishment. And that was a good thing in itself.

The great land of Hindustan has doubled its teeming populations and increased its prosperity out of all comparable reckoning during the fifty years that have passed

since the Mutiny. Many of the descendants of men who fought against the British Raj are now its trusted servants, and there is not in India to-day a native gentleman of any importance who would not assist the Government with his life and fortune to save his country from the lawless horrors of any similar outbreak.

But these are matters for the politician and the statesman. It is more fitting that this story of the lives and fortunes of a few of the actors in a great human drama should conclude with such particulars of their subsequent history as have filtered through time's close-woven meshes of half a century.

One day in February, not so long ago, a young officer of the Guides, who had come to Lucknow for "Cup" week, was standing in the porch of the Mohammed Bagh Club, when he heard a young lady bewailing the fate, in the shape of a tikkagharry, which had brought her there. Her "people" were at the Chutter Munzil Club, miles away, for Lucknow is a big place, and she was already late for tea.

Being a nice young man, the said officer of Guides could not bear to see a nice young woman in distress.

"My dogcart is just coming up," he said, "and I am going to the Chutter Munzil. Won't you let me drive you there?"

She blushed, and hesitated, and, of course, agreed.

On the way, to maintain a polite conversation, he pointed out several historic buildings.

"You are stationed here, I suppose?" she said.

"No, indeed. My regiment is at Quetta, but I was reared on the records of Lucknow. My grandmother

went through the whole of the siege, and my grandfather was with the Second Relief. It must have agreed with their health, for they were both out here two years since, and I went over the Mutiny ground with them."

"How interesting! Was that how they met?"

"No. They were engaged just before the Residency was invested. It is an awfully interesting yarn, and I should like some day to have a chance of telling it to you. There is a native princess in it, and a pearl necklace, which is worth quite a lot of money, and is believed to have been stolen by a sepoy before my grandfather obtained it, quite by accident. And the old chap—he was quite a young chap then, you know—had a remarkable native servant who did so well at the Mutiny that he became a nawab or something of the sort. Really, the whole thing is more like a book than a chapter of real life."

"I had a grandmother in the Mutiny," said the girl, "but she had such a sad experience that she seldom mentioned it. Her maiden name was Keene, and her father was killed at Fattehpur—"

"Keene! Did she ever speak of a man named Malcolm, who saved her and her sister?"

"Oh, yes! You don't mean to say—"

"Yes, really, I'm his grandson. Now, isn't that the queerest thing? Just imagine the odds against my meeting you here under such conditions? Please tell me your name, and you'll let me call, won't you?"

The girl was somewhat breathless. Young Malcolm was looking at her as though he felt that a special dispensation of Providence had brought them together.

"I am sure my mother will be glad to meet you and

hear all about those old days at Lucknow," she said shyly.

So it may be that the grey ruins of the Residency, over which the flag flies ever that was kept there so resolutely by the men and women in '57, saw the beginning of another love idyll, destined to end as happily as that which had its being amidst the terrors and fury of the Mutiny.

THE END

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